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ABSTRACT

Containing the results of Oregon's second statewide analytical writing assessment, this document summarizes the procedures used to evaluate the writing skills of 4,567 eighth graders from 55 schools and analyzes the results. Following an introduction that includes comments from the scoring team, chapter 1 presents a brief history of writing assessment in Oregon, including the rationale behind scoring methods, writing models, and paper selection. Chapter 2 gives a trait by trait analysis of content, organization, voice, word choice, sentence structure, and conventions of the sample papers. Chapter 3 compares the 1985 and 1987 assessments, concluding that the differences in performance cannot be attributed to scoring team variance, but that some differences may be attributable to variance in the writing prompts. Chapter 4 reviews potential influences affecting student performance, including the prompt, teacher attitude, understanding of the exercise, curriculum, and instruction. Chapter 5 provides a detailed summary of the findings and recommendations of the interpretive panel. The report's conclusions include the following: (1) students' writing seems balanced between strengths and weaknesses, with a preponderance of scores of 3 on a 5 point scale; (2) the average score for all traits is slightly higher than in 1985, and signs of strength across several traits indicate successful strategies on the part of teachers; and (3) the value of a writing assessment lies in its ability to build understanding between teachers and students about the nature of good writing. A note on the follow-up to the 1987 assessment is included, and appendixes contain the writing prompt and student instructions, the letter to students accompanying the test results, and a list of interpretive panel members for 1987. (JG)

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Results and Analysis of the 1987 Oregon Statewide Writing Assessment

Prepared by the

Oregon Department of Education
Verne A. Duncan
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June 1987

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FOREWORD

This is the first statewide assessment based on the Essential Learning Skills adopted by the State Board of Education in December 1985. Thus, these test results should be regarded as a baseline, against which we will measure progress over the next several years.

The results give cause for pride as well as concern. As you will see in the following pages, some Oregon eighth grade students write extremely well and I'm sure you'll enjoy the writing they have shared with us. Most of the students are also able to use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. However, we are concerned about the limited number of studer. , who are able to produce writing that is well organized, develops clear ideas, uses good word choice, and is interesting to read.

One of the goals of the writing assessment is to identify the qualities of good writing and to use the qualities as standards throughout the state. The Essential Learning Skills emphasize skills that should help all students to produce the type of writing that the better students are currently producing.

I believe we are moving in the right direction with the curriculum initiatives begun under the Oregon Action Plan for Excellence. These test results indicate that we still have work to be done in preparing Oregon students for success in high school and in adult life. Most of our eighth graders are proficient in ordinary written expression. However, Oregon educators have higher goals and expectations for our students.

Through our curriculum initiatives we have sent a challenge to Oregon's teachers and students. It is now incumbent on all of us to follow through with the training and support strategies tht will help them meet that challenge.

Verne A. Duncan
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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Oregon's 1987 Statewide Writing Assessment: An Introduction

In February 1987, the Oregon Department of Education conducted a statewide assessment of eighth graders' writing skills. A representative sample of eighth graders from throughout the state—4,567 students from 55 schools—participated in that assessment. On the day before the assessment was to begin, the purpose of the assessment was explained to students and they were told the topic on which they would be asked to write. On the first full day of the assessment, students had 45 minutes in which to draft their response to the topic. On the next day, they were given 60 minutes to edit, recopy and proofread their writing sample.

This was the second statewide analytical writing assessment for Oregon. Analytical writing assessment differs from other forms of writing assessment in that it attempts to distinguish the components of fine writing, to define each component as a part of a definitive scoring guide, and to score those components individually.

A group of language arts educators from throughout the state met after the assessment results were analyzed to help interpret the scores. Conclusions from their deliberations include the following:

- Overall, students' writing seems balanced between strengths and weaknesses. This is seen in the preponderance of scores of 3 on the 5-point scoring scale. (If the writing were very weak on one of the analytical traits, it would receive a score of 1; if it were very strong, it would receive a score of 5.)
- While the average score for all traits is slightly higher in 1987 than what was achieved in 1985, the change in writing topic from one year to another likely accounted for some of the apparent improvement. Nevertheless, there are still signs of strength across several traits, indicating that many writing teachers are using strategies that are working.
- The writing assessment is an attempt to quantify a subjective experience. There is a temptation to focus primarily on the numbers—the performance averages for each trait. But in analyzing the value of this process, we must also look behind the numbers. What matters ultimately is building understanding among student writers and teachers about what good writing is.

Chapter 2 of this report gives specific results from the assessment, while Chapter 5 provides a detailed summary of the findings and recommendations put forth by the interpretive panel.

We hope this report serves to answer many of the initial questions you may have about the assessment itself, and about the writing skills of Oregon's eighth graders. Since the 1985 Statewide Writing Assessment in Oregon, hundreds of teachers

throughout the state have become acquainted with the philosophy and process of analytical assessment and have begun to believe that there is in fact a way to forge a link between the writing skills we measure through assessment and those we value and teach in the classroom. This report is dedicated to their continuing effort.

Comments from the Scoring Team

Before beginning the summary of results, though, those who participated as raters to score papers for the 1987 Statewide Writing Assessment wish the participating student writers and their teachers to know how very much we enjoyed reading your papers. It was an instructive, enlightening experience for us all. We were impressed and delighted by the large number of students who wrote competently—and even, in some cases, with extraordinary skill. If you were among those who took time to participate, thank you for your time, your energy, and your willingness to share ideas. And to Oregon's writing teachers who participated, individual team members wish to offer the following comments:

- As a first-year team member, I was impressed with the majority of papers. I assessed good work.
- I think students need to be given more opportunity to express themselves through writing so they feel more comfortable and fluid with it. They also need to be encouraged to read more and perhaps analyze good writing.
- My hope for the continued use of this process rests with teachers knowing how much the scorers enjoy and care about these writings, and sharing this knowledge with students. All students, no matter what their writing ability, should be encouraged to express themselves honestly, to stretch their ideas and write in their own natural voice. Conventions and syntax can be better remedied in the aftermath of the assessment.
- Encouraging sentence variety is a good thing, but teachers would do well to help the students see that a forced sentence spoils the writing. For instance, too many sentences that begin with an *-ing* word lead to this kind of stultifier: *"Going to the mall is where we go shopping."* Could too much devotion to some textbook and worksheet exercises be the culprit?
- This is my third year on the team, and each year I look forward to coming back again. The people I've grown to know from doing this scoring are caring, knowledgeable, wonderful people who feel deeply about kids and their writing. I hope analytical scoring continues to grow and to become widely used throughout Oregon because I can see only good coming from it.
- In the future, many of us hope that additional ways can be found to involve teachers in the scoring process; what an excellent inservice opportunity.

- During each of the three years that I have participated in writing assessment, I have felt privileged to read and to learn. Your students often have much to say that is worth reading. Please encourage all of them to develop individuality in their choice of topics and writing styles. Care about what they have to say; it is stimulating, amusing—and sometimes disturbing.
- Once again, after three years of doing the assessment, I'm always delighted and disappointed with the wide array of students' writing ability. But I always learn so much about the process of writing each time I'm involved with this project. As a former high school English teacher, I never felt very comfortable teaching writing, but I feel very differently now and believe that I could teach writing because of this writing assessment.
- One of the benefits of reading and scoring hundreds of compositions is finding that students can write better than the public has been led to believe. When writing from their own experience, in an honest and committed manner, the students have made us cry and laugh as competently as any published author. And I feel honored to have experienced that.
- Are there problems with student writing? Certainly. In every assessment we encounter the familiar run-on sentences, faulty logic, threadbare ideas and scattered organization that have so often been heralded as signaling the decline of students' writing skills. But we who have been privileged to read hundreds upon hundreds of student papers know that these warnings and the dismal examples that often accompany them have told only part of the story. Throughout Oregon are hundreds of students who are emerging as capable young writers. For those of us who love writing, it is inspiring to come across a paper that rings with a natural storyteller's heartfelt voice. We have found many. We've read them eagerly and appreciatively, silently applauding the efforts of teachers with the courage and skill to help students become writers. To both the teachers and their students we say, Thank you for sharing with us a glimpse of your talent. Please keep writing.

Results and Analysis of the 1987 Oregon Statewide Writing Assessment

Chapter 1:
A Brief History of Writing Assessment in Oregon

The Oregon Assessment Program was initiated in 1973 to measure students' performance in the basic skills of reading, writing, and computing. The purpose of the program has been to establish a database for improving instruction and curriculum in these skills. Oregon began by testing reading, computing, and writing-related skills (e.g., identifying sentence fragments, using capitals correctly) measurable through objective, machine-scorable, multiple-choice tests. Later, a recommendation was made to assess writing directly through a writing sample: that is, an actual example of student writing that would be scored by a trained rater.

In 1978, the first statewide direct assessment of writing (i.e., via writing samples, not objective multiple-choice items) was conducted in Oregon. Students at grades 4, 7 and 11 were tested. A representative sample of schools throughout the state participated; they were selected on the basis of size, organizational structure, and geographic region (metropolitan, east, west).

The results were scored holistically. Holistic—or general impression scoring, as it is often called now—is essentially a rank ordering of papers from highest to lowest performance. In other words, raters who review the papers say, in effect, "Out of this group of papers, these are the best efforts, these the next best, these next, and these the least effective."

In a holistic assessment, each paper receives one score based on how the rater feels the paper works as a whole. In ranking or scoring papers, the rater compares each student's paper with anchor papers or model papers (sometimes called range finders) selected for their representativeness. Since Oregon used a four-point scale with its holistic scoring, raters received model papers for each of the four score levels (a 4 paper, 3 paper, and so on), and assigned scores to students' test papers by matching them against the model papers. These model papers, like the test papers themselves, revealed a mix of strengths and weaknesses: strong vocabulary, but poor organizational structure, or strong ideas, but weak mechanics, and so on. These traits or qualities of writing were not addressed or scored individually, however. In holistic scoring, scores depend on the rater's overall impression of how the piece as a whole works. And thus, it's up to the *writer* to figure out what particular mix of strengths and weaknesses led raters to assign the final score. Many different kinds of papers might receive, say, a score of 3. This lack of definition was frustrating to both students and teachers, but as yet there seemed no really worthwhile alternative to holistic scoring of writing samples.

In 1982, a second statewide direct assessment of student writing was conducted. Participating schools were chosen according to the same random sampling methods, and students at grades 4, 7 and 11 were tested. Again, the papers were scored holistically.

Analytical Scoring: The Need for More Diagnostic Information

Following the 1978 and 1982 writing assessments, many educators expressed a desire for more specific information. They wanted a scoring guide that would specify in advance the traits (ideas, organization, word choice, and so on) important to fine writing, and the strengths and weaknesses likely to be observable at each score level. If, for example, a paper were strong on ideas, but weak in sentence structure, that difference could not be reflected in a single holistic score; but it could easily be reflected in analytical scoring where traits are rated individually. The desire for a comprehensive, diagnostic profile of students' performance statewide was an important consideration influencing Oregon's decision to conduct an analytical writing assessment—but it was not the only consideration.

Instructional Advantages

Analytical scoring offers important instructional advantages. A comprehensive, well defined scoring guide is in effect a value statement about writing. It is not a test at all in the usual sense of the word—though it can be used as a scoring rubric to support the assessment of writing skill. In addition to its application in the statewide assessment, a comprehensive analytical scoring guide can be used to

- make assessment results clear to various audiences.
- help students understand what qualities are important in good writing.
- help beginning writers establish an orderly, systematic plan for editing and revising their writing.
- help teachers design writing instruction based on the qualities they wish to see demonstrated.
- help parents, students and others understand how student writing is evaluated.
- provide consistency in the way teachers rate student writing.
- provide a vocabulary that educators, students, and parents can use in talking about writing and writing instruction.

Selection of the Oregon Analytical Assessment Writing Model

Once the decision had been made to conduct an analytical assessment of writing in Oregon, it was still essential to identify a scoring guide. Numerous models were reviewed by the Department of Education prior to the 1985 writing assessment. Department language arts specialists determined that the scoring guide developed in 1984-85 by the Beaverton, Oregon School District was the most appropriate for use by the state. That guide was used to score papers for the 1985 Oregon Statewide Writing Assessment.

Following the 1985 statewide analytical assessment, many teachers throughout Oregon began using the analytical scoring guide as a part of classroom instruction.

Some districts—within Oregon and elsewhere—began using the guide, or their own version of it, to conduct their own analytical assessments. Over time, as a result of many excellent suggestions and comments by classroom teachers, the wording of the original guide was modified slightly, but these clarifications never changed the general content, spirit or philosophy of the original. [Special thanks are due the teachers of the Beaverton School District and Portland Public Schools, who contributed very extensively to development of the current version of the Analytical Scoring Guide now used by the State of Oregon.]

The Scoring Guide

The scoring guide used by Oregon incorporates six distinct traits: Ideas and Content; Organization; Voice; Word Choice; Sentence Structure; and Conventions. Each of these traits is scored individually. The individual scores for separate traits (e.g., Ideas and Content, Voice) are never combined in any way.

The guide is keyed to a nine-point scale in which scores range at half-point intervals from a low of 1.0 to a high of 5.0. Each trait is defined at the 5.0 (strong), 3.0 (balance of strengths and weaknesses) and 1.0 (weak) score levels. Thus, keep in mind that raters *do* assign scores of 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.5, 4.0 and 4.5, as appropriate, even though these score points are not explicitly defined on the scoring guide. To define all nine score points *in writing* would make the guide very long and cumbersome, and likely create more confusion than clarity.

Where did the definitions for each trait come from? They were developed by writing teachers at all grade levels (elementary, intermediate, high school) who began by defining the six traits within the scoring guide in general terms, and then refined those definitions based on the strengths and weaknesses they observed in actual student papers—hundreds of them. Every definition was field tested, refined and revised until the teachers who used it to rate students' writing agreed that the definition did, in fact, reflect what readers would actually see in students' writing, and what teachers of writing valued. In reaching consensus on these definitions, the writing teachers who developed the scoring guide asked—among other things—

- What makes a piece of writing work?
- What separates strong ideas from weak? Compelling organization from chaos?
- What are the indicators of a powerful, storytelling voice or good word choice?
- What are the hallmarks of sound, effective sentence structure?
- What purpose do conventions really serve in writing, and what distinguishes masterful use of conventions?

In answering such questions with explicit definitions, this analytical scoring guide defines for users the characteristics that trained, experienced language arts teachers use to distinguish effective writing from ineffective.

The scoring levels do not equate to grades. The five whole-point (e.g., 1.0, 2.0) levels of the scoring guide do NOT correspond in any way to grade levels A, B, C, D, and F. To view them in this fashion would lead to serious misinterpretation of the results, and would distort the spirit of the assessment. An analytical assessment, unlike some forms of writing assessment, is not judgmental in nature. It is diagnostic. Its purpose is to identify the strengths and weaknesses in students' writing at various levels. To assist your interpretation, consider that at the 3.0 level, strengths and weaknesses approximately balance. At the 3.5 level and above, strengths begin to outweigh weaknesses, and at the 5.0 level, strengths overwhelmingly predominate. Conversely, at the 2.5 level and below, weaknesses begin to outweigh strengths, and at the 1.0 level, weaknesses predominate. Keep in mind too that a student's score on one trait may be very different from his/her scores on any other trait.

Scoring Procedures

Obviously, an effective writing assessment requires the efforts of a qualified and dedicated scoring team. The construction and activities of the 1987 scoring team are described below.

The Scoring Team

A team of approximately 25 raters met during March to score the results of Oregon's 1987 writing assessment. Raters had been carefully screened and interviewed by the scoring director (who had served in that role for the 1985 assessment as well) prior to selection for the team, and were required to have strong language arts skills and familiarity with the purposes and philosophy of the assessment. Many had had teaching experience at or near the eighth grade level. In addition, many were professional writers, editors or journalists, and approximately half had had several years' experience as analytical writing assessment raters, including having served on the team that scored papers for the 1985 Oregon Statewide Writing Assessment.

During training, raters were required to read and score numerous student papers and to defend their scores based upon the scoring guide. Through discussion and practice, and the repeated comparison of their own scores to those of colleagues, raters gained familiarity with the scoring guide, and also learned to avoid many of the common causes of rater bias (e.g., poor handwriting, a tendency to ignore one trait in favor of another). Training really consists of building a team philosophy about writing, and of learning to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of student writing consistently. Repeated practice and discussion help ensure that all raters are scoring from a common base, applying the same values in the same way. Otherwise, the scores would not be meaningful. Following training, raters were required

to demonstrate their knowledge of the scoring guide by rating sample papers and then reviewing scores with the scoring director.

In addition to this initial training, brief "refresher" sessions were held throughout the scoring process to give raters additional practice, and ensure that they were continuing to function in a consistent manner.

Throughout training, raters also accumulated numerous practice papers which the team scored as a group. These served as writing models for the various score levels in much the same way that range finders provide level anchors for holistic scoring. Raters internalized the scoring guide fairly rapidly, and were able to score quite rapidly within a day or so; yet each paper received thorough and thoughtful attention.

Scoring Procedures

Each paper was scored twice, by two separate raters working independently. Rater 2 did not know what scores had been assigned by Rater 1 since Rater 1's scores were concealed before the paper was given to Rater 2. Scores were written in pencil on the front of each writing sample booklet.

Each paper received twelve scores (two for each of the six traits). Scores on different traits—say a 2.5 on Ideas and Content, a 3.0 on Organization and a 4.0 on Voice—were never combined in any way to produce an "average" or "total" score; that would defeat the purpose of the analytical approach, which is to determine where relative strengths and weaknesses lie within a piece of writing.

Students' papers were returned to them following the assessment so that they could see precisely how the two raters had scored each of the six traits.

Resolutions

Sometimes even trained, experienced raters do not agree precisely on what score a paper should receive. A certain range of disagreement is allowable, however, since small differences merely reflect the fact that in real life not everyone reacts precisely the same way to a piece of writing. For example, if Rater 1 assigns the trait of Voice a score of 2.5, and Rater 2 assigns that trait a score of 3.5, it is likely that most trained readers would assign a score within that range (2.5, 3.0 or 3.5). Differences of .5, 1.0 or 1.5 between raters were considered acceptable. Papers containing any scores that differed by two points or more were returned to the raters who had assigned those scores so that they could review their scores and re-rate the papers. Disagreements of two points or more occurred on roughly one percent of all traits scored.

Several methods were used to keep interrater consistency high. These were

- Regular group scoring of "problem" papers (identified by raters).

- Continuous refresher sessions throughout scoring.
- Continuous large- and small-group discussions of the traits and their interpretation.
- Specific, ongoing identification of strengths and weaknesses in papers at all score levels.
- Regular feedback to individual raters on their personal performance relative to that of the group.
- Occasional rescoring of papers to ensure that raters were scoring the same way throughout the process (i.e., not assigning a paper one set of scores early in scoring, then assigning the same paper very different scores later in scoring).

All raters had identification numbers, and recorded these numbers on the test booklets as they assigned scores. Raters who tended to score high or low with respect to any trait received immediate feedback on that tendency, and had a chance to rectify it through additional practice or conferencing.

Papers That Could Not Be Scored

Occasionally, it was necessary to omit a paper that could not be scored in the usual fashion. Such papers generally fell into one of these categories:

- *Too Short (TS)*: Blank or extremely brief papers (one sentence, sometimes two).
- *Illegible (IL)*: Papers that actually cannot be read at all, despite attempts by several different raters.
- *Non-English (NE)*: Those in which all or most of the paper is written in a language other than English; such papers can only be fairly assessed by raters fluent in the second language.
- *Miscellaneous (MS)*: This category covers special considerations which apply to only a very limited number of papers. For example, raters do not score poems because poetry is a special literary form which does not lend itself well to evaluation by the criteria within the Analytical Scoring Guide.
- *Off Topic Scorable (OTS)*: Papers in which the writer does not address the assigned topic, but does provide a sample of his or her writing that can be fairly scored using the scoring guide criteria. Results for these papers were not entered into the final data showing state averages (because, for assessment purposes, performance on two totally different tasks cannot be fairly compared), but the scores were returned to students and their teachers.

  Raters used considerable latitude in determining which subjects were considered "off topic." The philosophical intent of the writing assessment is

to measure students' writing skills, not their ability to follow directions. A "prompt" is intended to do just what its name suggests—to *prompt* a student to write. Thus, if students wrote about freedom, baseball, writing skill, school, parents or grandparents, dogs, horses, cats, brothers and sisters, the universe, or even life itself, these things were still considered to be within the broadest possible range of "objects" (the 1987 prompt), and were not marked off topic. Because of this broad interpretation, in fact, very few papers were marked off topic for the 1987 assessment.

- *Off Topic Nonscorable (OTN)*: Papers in which the writer makes no effort either to address the topic or to produce a piece of writing that might be suitable for assessment. Most such responses consist of a comment on the assessment topic or procedures. Some open letters to raters or teachers are scorable, some not—depending on the level of attempt and the seriousness with which the student writer approaches the task.

Using the Scoring Guide to Interpret Results

The guide in its current form is reprinted trait by trait on the following pages, together with line graphs illustrating eighth graders' performance with respect to each trait. The graphs illustrate performance in both 1985 and 1987. Remember, when comparing results however, that students in 1985 and 1987 responded to different prompts (more about this later). Also keep in mind that in 1985, raters did not assign scores at half-point intervals. They used a whole-point scale (but the same scoring guide) in which the only possible scores were 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5.

In analyzing results, please read the description of each trait carefully. You may also wish to review the list of Strengths and Weaknesses, which summarizes the essential characteristics raters look for in reviewing papers with respect to each trait. Remember that Oregon's analytical scoring system is based on the balance of strengths and weaknesses. At the 3.0 level, strengths and weaknesses are in balance. Beginning at the 3.5 level and moving up the scoring scale, strengths outweigh weaknesses—and at the 5.0 level, strengths dominate and weaknesses are negligible. Similarly, beginning at the 2.5 level and moving down the scoring scale, weaknesses begin to dominate—and at the 1.0 level, strengths are negligible.

Chapter 2:
Strengths and Weaknesses in Student Writing—
A Trait-by-Trait Analysis

The following analysis reveals the average scores for eighth graders as a whole, trait by trait, the specific strengths and weaknesses raters identified with respect to each trait, and the percentages of students for whom strengths outweighed weaknesses or vice versa. A few student papers are reproduced here as examples. (Where names, towns or other identifying information were included in the originals, they were changed to protect the student's privacy.) Obviously, writing is a highly subjective and personal task, and each student's writing is a little different from all others. Nevertheless, the examples help illustrate some of the common problems and strong points that raters discovered in the papers.

> Students demonstrated a wide range of performance with respect to every trait. It is worth noting that while many students revealed weaknesses that demand our attention, many others showed remarkable skill in writing. The purpose of this assessment has been, therefore, not only to focus on what is wrong, but also *to identify what is working well in order to give credit and recognition to the many students and teachers who are experiencing success with writing.*

Keep in mind in reviewing these scores that individual students' scores—as well as averages for a class or school—may differ considerably from what is reported here. Each student's performance represents a brief glimpse into his or her capabilities based on one task performed on two days. We recognize that many factors—including attitude, fatigue, understanding of the assignment, and previous experience—may influence a student's performance. Therefore, instructors must use their own discretion and judgment in determining whether the scores for an individual student are representative of that student's abilities. Within the classroom, assessment scores represent one piece of information which the teacher may combine with many other less formal assessment results to determine a particular student's current level of writing skill. But across the state, the factors affecting performance tend to balance out so that the averages for eighth graders as a whole provide a genuinely accurate profile of actual writing skills.

The Prompt

All eighth graders who participated in the 1987 Oregon Statewide Assessment wrote in response to the following prompt:

> Write about an object that is important to you, something that has become part of your life or reminds you of a person, place or time that you like to remember.

Some students showed startling insight and remarkable capacity to think through an issue. For these students, the object selected was often representative or symbolic of some deeper feeling. A quilt may have reminded a student of her grandmother, a necklace recalled a harrowing trip to freedom for a student born in another country, a rifle signified independence and recognition as a responsible adult, an old Army jacket symbolized a kind of quirky individuality with a humorous twist. The students who really thought through the prompt tended either to select an object that was unique, known or appreciated only by them—or else they wrote about a common object (e.g., a basketball, a pair of shoes) in an unusual, highly individual way.

By contrast, some students seemed to seize upon the first object at hand—teddy bears, blankets, skateboards and motorcycles were the most frequently selected objects. And while there is certainly nothing inherently wrong in writing on something that several other students elect to write about, the writer who does so runs the risk that his or her paper will tend to blend in with countless others if it covers much the same territory in much the same way—which, unfortunately, was often the case. Skateboard papers, for example, tended to open with a broad physical description (inches wide, inches long, color, etc.), to list special features or equipment, to name special stunts performed by the writer or the writer's friends, and to conclude with some generalizations about the "feeling of freedom" provided by skateboarding or a statement like "My skateboard is the most important thing in my life." Rarely did a paper on skateboarding differ significantly from this pattern.

Students who wrote about something different, or who revealed a bit of themselves through heartfelt writing, tended to write more interesting and enlightening papers, and thus tended to receive the higher scores with respect to the traits of Ideas and Content, and Voice. These students did not settle for the first object that came to mind, but instead seemed to have given thought to selecting something that would allow them to write what they felt about life, people, and growing up. The results were impressive, to say the least.

Trait 1: Ideas and Content

In 1987, the average score for eighth graders across the state on the trait of Ideas and Content was 3.2; in other words, for the typical student, strengths slightly outnumbered weaknesses. Overall, 39% of the students revealed more strengths than weaknesses on this trait (compared to 26% in 1985); only 18% revealed more weaknesses than strengths (compared to 33% in 1985). And 42% scored right at the mid-level; that is, their scores revealed a balance of strengths and weaknesses on this trait. [Percentages in this and subsequent summaries may not add to exactly 100% because of rounding.]

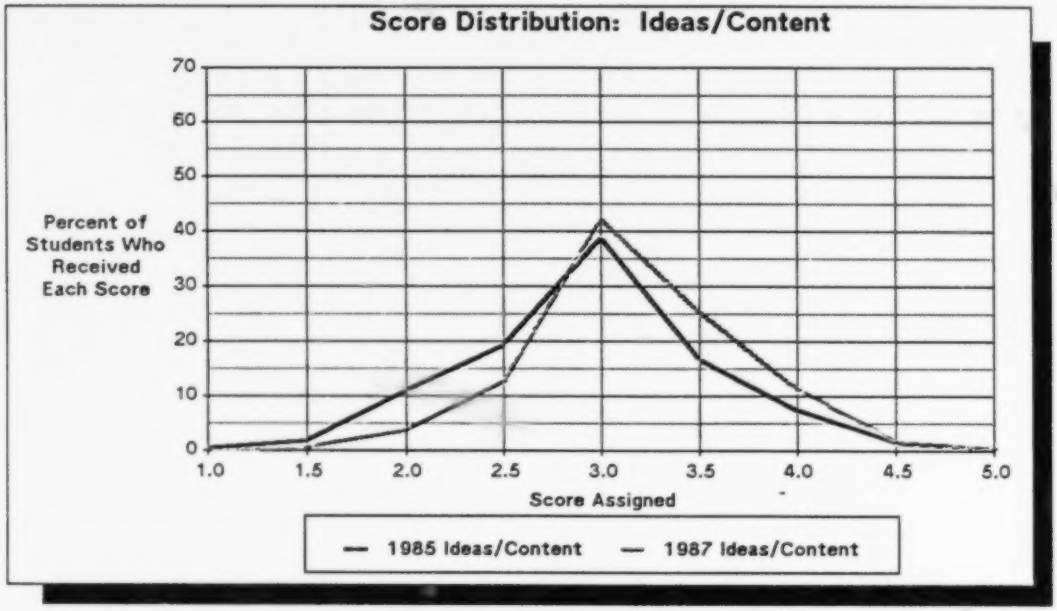

Figure 1

NOTE: In comparing performance for 1985 and 1987, keep in mind that slightly different scoring scales were used. In 1985, raters could only assign whole-point scores: 1, 2, 3, and so on. Thus, only 4s and 5s were considered as papers in which strengths outweighed weaknesses; only 2s and 1s were considered as papers in which weaknesses outweighed strengths. In 1987, because of the half-point interval scale, it is possible to view scores of 3.5 and above as denoting predominant strength, 2.5 and below as denoting predominant weakness.

Also, it is important for readers to understand that differences in results are attributable in some measure to the change in prompt between 1985 and 1987. Chapter 3 describes this phenomenon in more detail.

Trait Description

Score Point 5: This paper is clear in purpose and conveys ideas in an interesting, original manner that holds the reader's attention. Often, the writing develops as a process of discovery for both reader and writer. Clear, relevant examples, anecdotes or details develop and enrich the central idea or ideas.

- The writer seems to be writing what he or she knows, often from experience.
- The writer shows insight—a good sense of the world, people, situations.
- The writing is often enlivened by spontaneity or a fresh, individual perspective.
- The writer selects supportive, relevant details that keep the main idea(s) in focus.
- Primary and secondary ideas are developed in proportion to their significance; the writing has a sense of balance.
- The writer seems in control of the topic and its development throughout.

Score Point 3: The writer's purpose is reasonably clear; however, the overall result may not be especially captivating. Support is less than adequate to fully develop the main idea(s).

- The reader may not be convinced of the writer's knowledge of the topic.
- The writer seems to have considered ideas, but not thought things through all the way.
- Ideas, though reasonably clear and comprehensible, may tend toward the mundane; the reader is not sorry to see the paper end.
- Supporting details tend to be skimpy, general, predictable, or repetitive. Some details seem included by chance, not selected through careful discrimination.
- Writing sometimes lacks balance: e.g., too much attention to minor details, insufficient development of main ideas, informational gaps.
- The writer's control of the topic seems inconsistent or uncertain.

Score Point 1: This paper lacks a central idea or purpose—or the central idea can be inferred by the reader only because he or she knows the topic (question asked).

- Information is very limited (e.g., restatement of the prompt, heavy reliance on repetition) or simply unclear altogether.
- Insight is limited or lacking (e.g., details that do not ring true; dependence on platitudes or stereotypes).
- Paper lacks balance; development of ideas is minimal, or there may be a list of random thoughts from which no central theme emerges.

- Writing tends to read like a rote response—merely an effort to get something down on paper.
- The writer does not seem in control of the topic; shorter papers tend to go nowhere, longer papers to wander aimlessly.

Strengths

With respect to Ideas and Content, raters look for a paper that's very focused, with a readily identifiable theme. The theme might take the form of a purpose, major outcome or point of view: what the writer thinks or feels about life. Successful papers create a strong impression and tend to show insight based on true personal experience. In addition, stronger papers tend to hold the reader's attention, and to reflect some liveliness and spontaneity.

Specifically, the stronger papers tend to be

1. *clear* so that even a reader who did not know the assigned writing assessment topic would have no trouble figuring out what the writer was trying to say.
2. *interesting* and fun to read.
3. *thoughtful*, showing that the writer has spent some time considering the content of the paper and its implications.
4. *original*—not necessarily unique with respect to the ideas or experiences related, but fresh in approach, showing the student writer's own way of looking at the world.
5. *well developed*, with carefully selected examples, details or anecdotes that help bring the central idea into focus.
6. *valid*, with a "ring of truth" coming from either the student's own experience or insight about life and human relationships.
7. *controlled and well handled,* so that the reader does not need to mentally "create" the paper by filling in gaps, making inferences, or inventing details.

Weaknesses

By contrast, the weaker papers tend to be

1. *unfocused or unclear*, often having no identifiable central theme, or else not hitting upon the main idea until the last line.
2. *disjointed* or confused—often a laundry list of ideas rather than one central idea well developed (e.g., "Some of my favorite things are my friends, my family, television and school . . . ").
4. *empty*—lacking in content; often just an expanded cliche or a rehash of ideas heard elsewhere.

5. *repetitive*—restating the prompt (topic) itself or presenting the writer's first-paragraph idea in several different ways.
6. *superficial*—lacking in insight.
7. *underdeveloped*—one or more generalizations not backed by relevant, helpful examples or details (e.g., "Everyone should have a favorite object because favorite objects are really important.")
8. *inadequate*, showing limited knowledge of the subject.

Sample Papers

The following two papers are strong in the Ideas and Content trait. The first paper is remarkably clear and controlled. The second paper is well developed and never loses focus. (All papers in this report appear as students wrote them.)

The roar of the Olymics, the thrill of a roller coaster, and the peacefulness of the coast, all together. They mean much more than a piece of cold metal with colors thrown on the front. Holding any one of my pins brings memories of past events. My stomache falls as I hold up a roller coaster car. I feel the warmth of the sun as an Oregon Coast pin lies in my hand. I smell pine as I hold a Christmas wreath. The crowds gasp as a high jumper reaches the peak of his leap. All of that pinned onto one hat.

I remember walking through shopping centers while my mom looked for shoes. I always wished I would grow another inch or two so my feet could fit into the wonderful "big person's shoes." My mother would look over several kinds, then, after choosing her favorite, ask the clerk for the left shoe, I longed for the day when I could try them on, just like she did.

Being able to wear shoes with heels represented a grown-up to me. I wanted to be an adult in the worst way. Sometimes after we had gone shopping, I would sneak into my mother's bedroom. Then, quietly, so no one would hear, I would slip the new shoes out of their box and onto my feet. What I used to think was a grand and ladylike gait, was really an unsteady wobble. I would saunter over to the full length mirror to admire my shoes, well, her shoes. Then I would twirl around and cast condesending glances at the closet, nitestand, lamp, and other furniture. I would pretend these things were some of the other fourth graders in my class at school.

One Saturday afternoon, I was destined to spent the day at a shoe store in town. Sitting in the back seat, I started to think about fancy shoes. Upon arriving, I discovered large signs that advertised a sale at the shoe store. Grudgingly I dragged in. After a few minutes, I noticed something. My mom, who wears a size 7 1/2, was looking in the size 5 1/2 section. Suddenly, I stratened up and looked at her again. Yes, she was there! I couldn't believe it, maybe she was looking for shoes for me. "Molly," said my mother "Would you come over here for a moment?" Immediately I leaped to my feet, and in a flash I was by my mother's side. In her hand was a shoe, the most beautiful that I had ever seen. It was black patten with a dazzling red bow on the toe. "Honey, would you try this on?" she said. Immediately I said yes. The shoe fit perfectly. It was made for me. I looked pleadingly into her eyes for the sparkle that ment that I could have them. Then she said "Clerk, would you please get the mate for me?" I just couldn't believe it! I was the luckiest girl in the whole fourth grade.

When we got home, I tried on the shoes with my best dress. Then I went into the kitchen and twirled around so my father could see. I didn't know what he would say. I stood and bit my lip in waiting for the inevidable to come. To my suprise he said I was turning into a pretty young lady! I will remember that moment forever.

A year or so later I grew out of the shoes. I regretfully packed my shoes into a box to give away. A girl who lived next door was to get my shoes. A few months later I was at a school carnival and saw the girl wearing my shoes. They were a size too big and they flopped around. Even so, I could see the glow on her face. She was wearing "big person's shoes."

These two papers are good examples of writing that earned mid-range scores on the trait. The first paper seems to be forcing ideas to fill up the paper. The paper about home is not insightful and seems desparate for ideas.

A Basketball

A basketball is important to me because, it makes me feel like I'm wanted. The ball just sits quietly until you pick it up. Then the action starts. You can start to dribble, while shuffling around. If you want, you may do some fancy moves, like professionals. For example, when they jam the ball, and hang on the rim. They're the greatest, I think.

I've always wanted to be able to move and play the way they do. The best player in the NBA is Larry Bird. Some people might not agree. Larry can handle the ball with much care. He just doesn't throw it away, like some players. Larry is outstanding when he's dribbling. It seems like his whole entire hand covers the ball for safety.

I play basketball. I suppose I'm pretty good, sometimes. People tell me I'm doing a wonderful job. I know when I do great in basketball and I know when I do awful.

It makes me feel good about myself when people I don't know come up to me and say, "You did a super job tonight. I can tell your going to be a star player in the future. Keep working hard."

You can do lots with a basketball. If you have a friend you can pass it back and fourth. Next you could try to spin it on your finger. After that, you may want to practice shooting for your next game. Finally you might just sit down and look how the stitches were sown, and how round the ball is.

The basketball is a great thing to have. If you don't have one, I'd advise you to get one. In my opinion, your missing out of a lot of fun.

All the things I told you about could have not have happened without a basketball.

My home is very important to me because it gives me the warmth that I need to stay alive. I've been out camping several times, and I really enjoy camping. Although camping is a great way to spend time, I still like to come home to the comfort and pleasure that my home gives me.

Sometimes when I get sick at school, or anywhere else, I just love to go home and enjoy all of the the pleasures that I get when I go home.

I love my home because my parents are there. They care for me when I get sick. They also pay for the heating bill. Without our heat, we would get mighty cold at night.

When I come home in the summer from working in the heat all day, I enjoy the cool air our air conditioner puts out. I can kick back and relax while I do practically anything that I want to. Such as watch T.V., read, or listen to the radio.

Our house isn't cluttered all over to the extent that you can't see anything. Our passegeways are clean and it's very easy to get around. You don't have to jump over clothes, and cats, and other obstacles that just happen to be in your way.

My mom always makes a special point of cleaning so the couch isn't dusty or all torn up. The tables and nice and clean. Some houses have a lot of dust on the tables, but not ours.

We have supurb insulation. Our house is hardly ever cold in the winter. Sometimes my father forgets to build a fire, but it is usually quite warm in our house.

The only thing I hate about our house is the fact that it is totally boring. Nothing ever happens around my place.

Well, that's what I like, and don't like about my house.

These four papers represent weak papers in the Ideas and Content trait. The first paper is a fantasy gone wrong. The topic is unappealing, but the greatest weakness is that the writing gets away from the author: the student is no longer in control. The next two papers lack development and are merely "laundry lists" of detail. The last paper is weak because it is so obscure.

My favorite object is my guns. I have a BT 99 12 guage shotgun, a 22 bolt action Remington, a 30-30, and a real old 12 guage shotgun with a big chip in its stock.

My favorite object's can protect me from robbers, or bad people that might hurt me or my family. My favorite object also helps me kill animals that let me and my family be able to eat.

One day I was hunting with my favorite object. As I was walking through the brush I heard a noise, so I shot towards the noise. I waited for my bullet to hit the object. Then all of a sudden a man fell over with a hole through his head.

My other favorite object is the bullet. It is what comes out of my favorite object. It is the thing that helps kill the animals or the robbers and bad people that might hurt me or my family.

One day I was making bullets when I heard a scream. I ran to the house and my wife was being rapped, so I grabbed my favorite object and put my other favorite object in my favorite object and killed the man that was rapping my wife. I went to the house, and I found out that the man was a federal goverment agent tring to see if my wife had a purse.

I new I would be in trouble for what I did so I got all the guns I could and got ready for the goverment to come get me.

I dug me grave but a big blockade around it and I was ready to die with me favorite objects.

My Cats

I have five cats. Their names are Patches, Pooky, Popcorn, Oreo, and Shaton. All of them are girls except for Pooky. Patches is the oldest, she's eight years old. Oreo and Shaton are almost two years old. Popcorn and Pooky are almost one year old.

I got Patches from a friend after my other cat was killed. Patches just lived with us for about five years. Then I went to Maui with my mom and I left her with my dad. I missed her so much that my mom caught a wild cat for me and I tamed her. So my brother and I brought her back to Oregon. Then one day my brother and I came home from school and there were four baby kittens there. And Shaton and Oreo were two of them. That's how I got Shaton and Oreo.

How I got Pooky and Popcorn is Oreo had kittens May 24, 1986. Oreo had four kittens but one died, and Shaton had four kittens also. Oreo had Pooky, and Shaton had Popcorn. We still have them and their doing just fine.

Im writing about the gun cause it is important to me.

Why is it important to me. Cause if we americans didn't have guns we would be dangered by many things on earth.

Just how do you think we americans took victory over the british.

If we didn't have guns we wouldn't be able to hunt.

We couldn't target anything.

We also couldn't use self defense.

I also like guns cause they are loud.

Guns are very expensive.

Guns come in many colors.

Guns mostly are black.

You can find guns in many assortments.

Guns can also be dangerous

Guns come from new to old.

They can rust too.

You haft to clean your guns.

You need bulletts for them.

You also need a holster.

Some guns need clips.

And some guns can backfire.

And guns are easy to use.

Everything is beautiful here. In sound, it is another world I can surround myself in music. True words make me think of him, my Friend who is lost.

Where would I be, if I lost this world? So new it is but mine all the same. Never will they sing for another like they do for me.

"Light one candle and listen. Hush, close your eyes. The world is not so bad! I love you, and always will. . .no matter what."

They sing of death, of life, of peace, and of war. All things I know. Things even outside my circle, outside my life.

And as the rain beats down upon the roof, I know that I am strong and true. I know my way and walk straight.

Even my tracks speak of music, hope. To dance away fears and make me whole is my way.

"Listen! Hush! Close your eyes. This means alot to me."

"And me too! Really. I can see why it is your shelter."

"Yes," he says bitterly. "I should change that because I do care."

"And that makes us different. We do care. . .about music, about life, about this world."

"I want you to have this. Remember me no matter what, o.k.?'

"I will. I promise. You are my best friend."

"Really?"

"Yes," I lied. Why? Because the music told me to. In a way it told him too.

"No matter what, remember," it said.

"Oh I will! I will. I must"

Tell me now, do you understand? This is actually a very simple story, but the explaination has many paths both rocky and smooth. It does not have a more complete explaination than this.

There. It is done.

Trait 2: Organization

The average score for 1987 eighth graders on the trait of Organization was 3.0, the point where strengths and weaknesses are equal. Overall, this was the weakest area of performance statewide, with 30% of the students tested showing more weaknesses than strengths in organization (but still an improvement over the 49% in 1985). The news was not all bad, though, for the same number of students—30%—showed more strengths than weaknesses in their writing with respect to this trait (versus a mere 20% in 1985). And almost 10% more—38% versus 29%—scored at mid-level in 1987.

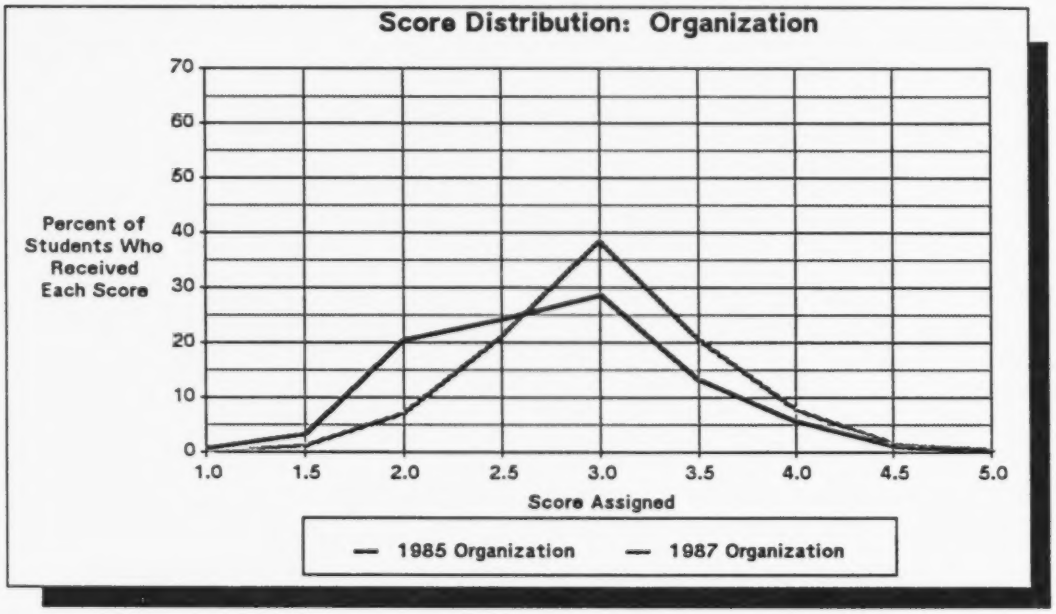

Figure 2

Trait Description

Score Point 5: The writer organizes material in a way that enhances the reader's understanding, or that helps to develop a central idea or theme. The order may be conventional or not, but the sequence is effective and moves the reader through the paper.

- Details seem to fit where they're placed, and the reader is not left with the sense that "something is missing."
- The writer provides a clear sense of beginning and ending, with an inviting introduction and a satisfying conclusion ("satisfying" in the sense that the reader feels the paper has ended at the right spot).

- Transitions work well; the writing shows unity and cohesion, both within paragraphs and as a whole.
- Organization flows so smoothly that the reader doesn't have to think about it.

Score Point 3: The writer attempts to organize ideas and details cohesively, but the resulting pattern may be somewhat unclear, ineffective, or awkward. Although the reader can generally follow what's being said, the organizational structure may seem at times to be forced, obvious, incomplete or ineffective.

- The writer seems to have a sense of beginning and ending, but the introduction and/or conclusion tend to be less effective than desired.
- The order may not be a graceful fit with the topic (e.g., a forced conventional pattern, or lack of structure).
- The writer may miss some opportunities for transitions, requiring the reader to make assumptions or inferences.
- Placement or relevance of some details may be questionable (e.g., interruptive information; writer gets to the point in roundabout fashion).
- While some portions of the paper may seem unified (e.g., organization within a given paragraph may be acceptable), cohesion of the whole may be weak.

Score Point 1: Organization is haphazard and disjointed. The writing shows little or no sense of progression or direction. Examples, details, or events seem unrelated to any central idea, or may be strung together helter-skelter with no apparent pattern.

- There is no clear sense of a beginning or ending.
- Transitions are very weak or absent altogether.
- Arrangement of details is confusing or illogical.
- There are noticeable information "gaps"; the reader is left dangling, or cannot readily see how the writer got from one point to another.
- The paper lacks unity and solidarity.

Strengths

With respect to Organization, the raters look for a paper with a definite sense of pacing; it may or may not have a conventional pattern (e.g., the traditional five-paragraph essay), but the progression of events does move the reader through the paper in some logical manner without getting bogged down in repetition or extraneous information. The organization may be based on a recurring theme, an evolving idea or impression, a careful building to a climax, a gradual revelation of information or resolution of some question, or a time progression.

Specifically, the stronger papers in Organization tend to

1. *have a strong opening* that make the reader want to keep reading (e.g., "A blue glass bottle most people wouldn't look at twice holds some special memories for me . . . ")
2. *show logical progression* (not necessarily the standard 5-paragraph essay unless that structure fits the student's approach and theme well); the paper started somewhere and led to something—a climax, conclusion, high point, revelation, solution, or whatever.
3. *reflect a sense of order*, so that details or events seemed to come at the right time, to fit where placed, and to serve a purpose.
4. *include enough detail* so that there did not seem to be large informational gaps.
5. *get to the heart of things* without dwelling on trivia.
6. *make good use of transitions* so that the reader could always see how the writer got from one point to another.
7. *conclude effectively* by leaving the reader something to think about—not simply announcing the end (e.g., "Now I have told you three things about my favorite object . . . ").
8. *stop* when the writer has nothing more to say.

Weaknesses

By contrast, the weaker papers in Organization tend to

1. *begin in the middle* of things, or else *open with a belabored introduction* (e.g., "You have asked me to write about a favorite object and the thing that I have chosen . . .).
2. *insert too much detail* before getting to the point.
3. *include too much "interruptive information"*—extraneous, irrelevant details that bog down or obscure the main ideas.
4. *start an idea but never complete it* or flesh it out.
5. *show excessive repetition*, with one idea repeated two, three or even more times.
6. *lack direction*—simply drift aimlessly with little or no sense of progress or direction.
7. *conclude weakly or abruptly*, often stopping at random or just repeating the introduction in slightly different words.
8. *continue just for the sake of filling space* (e.g., "Well, I guess I'd better write a little more because I haven't filled two pages yet . . .) even when the writer really has nothing more to say.

Sample Papers

These papers are good examples of strong organization. Both papers show selected, relevant details and reflect a sense of order. The first paper has particularly good pacing.

HERBY
the life and times of a pet rock

Herby is my pet rock. Though he is only the size of a pebble he has more life in him than any boulder I've ever met. Herb has one eye.

Some people think that rocks are stupid pets. I strongly disagree. They are usually quiet. They have relatively small appetites and they are easy to housebrake.

Most rocks lead calm, quiet lifes, but once in a while even a common pebble can have a traumatic experience. Even before I found him Herb had experienced many such adventures.

I found Herb lonly and incredibly bored by the roadside in front of my house shortly after moving to Smockly. When Herb befriended me his life was eternally altered.

I showed Herb the time of his life. I took him to school so he could learn. Teachers didn't really understand Herb so he eventually stopped coming. Herb liked to stay home and watch t.v. so I let him. He enjoyed early mornings so I woke him up and took him to see the sunrise a million times. It was a glorius life. I even built Herby his own environment equipt with sand, fossils, paper snails and everything else a rock could possibly want. But in the midst of all this glory disaster struck.

One day I came by to say hello to Herby and lo and behold he had vanished! I searched everywhere for him but I found no clues to his mysterious disappearance. I recieved no ransom notes as I had expected. I even began to suspect my closest friends of theft.

Herby's loss was really devestating. I kept going over to Herby's place expecting him to be there only to find that it was not a nightmare. Herb was really gone.

Just as I was about to give in to despare I found Herby. He was at the foot of my file cabinet (which I was sure I had searched). He had a look on his face as if to say, "Well, I'm back so don't just stand there like a moron, pick me up"!

I was overjoyed, I was estatic, and I was pretty happy, too.

Herby was back and everything was going to be okay!

There is something in my room that means more to me than anything else. It sits up on my shelf and stands out. It's my teddy bear "Pinky." Pinky is missing one eye and his grey hair is falling out. His hair used to be a beautiful, soft pink, but I loved all the color out of him. To just anyone Pinky may seem homely or ugly but to me he is beautiful.

There is a very big story behind my bear that I've never told anyone. Thirteen years ago my mother was married to a different man. He was my real father but not a father. He was an alcoholic and drank all the money we had. We had no money but my mother managed to scrape up three dollars to buy me this beautiful bear. She could have bought anything but instead she bought something her three month old daughter did not have, a toy. It was a little stuffed bear for me to love.

I loved that bear to death. It was and still is my favorite toy. It was more that just a bear though. In its back was a music box. He was a musical bear that played Rock-a- bye baby every time you turned the knob.

Scince then life has changed greatly. My mother remarried and everything is better. This new man she married adopted me and can aford to buy me many stuffed animals. I have three shelves full, but none of those expensive animals are a precious to me as that one bear.

He has fallen apart many times and needed to be sewn. But the music box still plays softly. His green eye still sparkles and he is beautiful.

These two represent papers receiving mid-range scores on the trait. The first paper uses standard organization. The second one shows how the artificial constraints of the traditional five-paragraph essay format often causes stilted writing.

A Pair Of Spurs

My pair of cowboy boots are very special to me. They were given to me by my great grandmother, right before she died. A pair of spurs belonged to my great grandmother's grandmother and her grandmother before her, they date clear back to the early 1800's. The spurs cannot be used of the value of them will go down about 50%. I use the boots all the time, but the spurs hang on the wall right above my dresser, the only time I take them off the wall is to clean them.

Something also very special came along with them, stories, stories of how it was in the old days and how people lived and made things. I sit down sometimes to hear my grandmother tell me stories of when she was a little girl, stories of her grandpa and dad when they had a hospital for horses, and of the remedies for just about anything a horse can get sick with. Grandma lived through the great depression, that's where I first learned about it. She told me about what she had to fix for them to eat with the little money they had.

Grandmother told me about when my family came to America from England and how they farmed, she even has some of the tools they used to farm with, they were handed down to her by her grandmothers. I also found out that I am closely related to Sam Houston.

Someday I hope to hand the spurs down to my grandaughter, and to tell her the stories that were told to me. The antiques that are soon going to be handed down to me are also going bo be handed down to my grandaughter, and I hope they hand them down to their grandchildren, to keep the tradition alive.

The object that I like most

The object that I like most is my horse. I like my horse the most because he's fun, fast, and pretty.

My horse is fun because I do alot of things with him for example. I play with him and race him and jump him over the jumps I put up. He's also fun because he likes to play alot like he'll buck and run when hes happy and he'll chase me.

I think my horse is fast because I race him againts other horses on the road and he can out run all of them. I also think he's fast because I race him up this gravel road that's next to my house and it's up hill and pretty long. He can run it in 9 seconds.

I also think hes fast because he will run really fast in his feild when my Dad drives up our driveway because he likes to race him up to my house.

I think my horse is pretty because he's a dapple gray and I like horses that are that color. Also his personality let's him express that he knows he's pretty. For example he shows off alot and he thinks that he's pretty neat. I think he's a pretty horse inside not just outside. I can tell because he always wants to be pet and hugged and he's never kicked or bit me. He's a pretty hyper horse because hes arabian but pretty, fun and fast.

These four papers exhibit different flaws, but all resulted in lower scores on the Organization trait. The first paper demonstrates "blender organization," i.e., the details are mixed and scrambled on the page. The second and third papers are failed attempts at standard five-paragraph organization. The fourth paper lacks

direction and bounces from one topic to the other and back, much like watching a tennis match.

Evreything in the world has to have food may it be good food or junk food. Junck food is one of the more populare food. Most people like soda pops, hambriger, popcorn, shakes etc. Some of the places you can get these at is at 7 eleven stores, Mc donalds, Dariy Queen etc.

Some Health food nut say that you will get fat if you eat hamburgere. You will but if you just at health food al the time, your body will get to meny vitimens and you can die. Health food is a food that will give your vitemans and cleans out yore iners.

You nead your vitemens if you want to stay healthy. If you don't get enought food you whont get your vitemens.

Eny whay you nead junk food to get your adrental gland working. Junk food like hamburger is good food. some people say that it is bad for you or is it. I don't think it is so bad for you because you get tomatos, lettice, musterd, relish and meat. Shakes. shakes are made out of milk, ice, and aritvial flaver and suger.

Some people say that fried chiken is good for you but is it. The chiken is fried in nothing but oil. If you eat to much of the skin you will get sike but I like fried chiken. It is one of my favorit food so I dont care what eny one thinkes. If it is food it is food.

If you just had a candy bare out in the desert would you just throw it a way hec no. If you were out on the dessert you would take one bite of it and keep it in your mouth for days.

If you don't eat eny food you will die in 63 days of what is called starvation. starvaison ocures wen you don't get enought food and you dont get eny oxegen to your bones.

The object I'm going to write about is my pellet gun. My pellet gun is fun and challenging.

I like my pellet gun because it is fun. My dad suggested that I get a bottle cap, punch a hole in it, and hang it from a tree by a string. After school I go out and start shooting at that bottle cap. It gets harder when it gets moving around.

The other reason why I like my pellet gun is because its challenging. I can hit things easy with it, But when it gets about fifty yards out it gets challenging. I usually use a rest when I shoot that far.

Those are the things I like about my pellet gun. Its fun and challenging.

I wish my parents would have never got divorced. I have a picture that reminds me of good times and bad times. There are so many reasons why I feel sad when I see it but Ill only say four.

In the First place the picture makes me happy when I see It because it reminds me of good times we had. Once we went camping, fishing ect that reminded me of good times. Furthurmor, I wish It would of never hapened. All I wanted was to live a good life but It happened to me I was hopeless in School I got very poor grades. Next, of all I would want it to be like it use to be. In conclusion when I look at the picture I feel sad.

The thing I like most is my sterio its realy cool. I got it for Christmas. I was so supprised that I got it. I never got a radio for Christmas before. I got a watch to for Christmas. I like my watch it has buttons and stuff on it. I like my sterio the best though. Because its the most expensive thing I got for Christmas. My sisters got me the watch. I think I like the most is my sterio and my watch. I like my sterio the most because it is loud and I just about break the windows of our house. I like my watch because it beeps every hour and it bugs the teachers to death. I like my radio and watch both. My watch that I got is digital. My radio goes realy loud it has 4 speakers. Its AM,FM sterio dual cassete player. It has an amplifier right by the speakers. Everyone likes my sterio because its dual cassete and its realy neat. Everyone likes my watch to because it has buttons on the top of it.

Trait 3: Voice

The average performance of eighth graders on this trait was 3.3, indicating that a number of students received scores of 3.5 or higher on this trait. In fact, average performance on Voice was stronger than for any other trait in the 1987 writing assessment. Fully 46% of the students tested—nearly half—revealed more strengths than weaknesses in their writing with respect to this trait (up from 38% in 1985); only 10% revealed more weaknesses than strengths (down from 16% in 1985). And 43% scored at the mid-level in 1987.

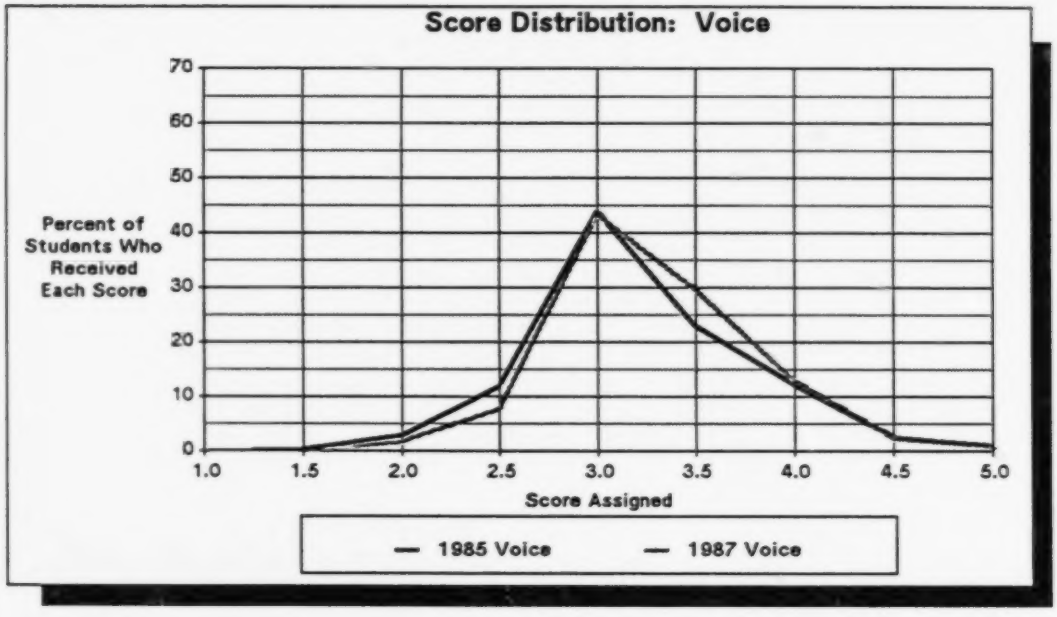

Figure 3

Trait Description

Score Point 5: The paper bears the unmistakable stamp of the individual writer. The writer speaks directly to the reader, and seems sincere, candid and committed to the topic. The overall effect is individualistic, expressive and engaging; this paper stands out from the others.

- The reader feels an interaction with the writer, and through the writing, gains a sense of what the writer is like.
- The paper is honest. There is a real effort to communicate, even when it means taking a risk (e.g., an unexpected approach or revealing of self).
- The writing is natural and compelling.

- Tone is appropriate and consistently controlled.
- The writer's own enthusiasm or interest comes through and brings the topic to life.

Score Point 3: The writer makes an honest effort to deal with the topic, but without a strong sense of personal commitment or involvement. The result is often pleasant or acceptable, yet not striking or compelling in a way that draws the reader in.

- The reader has only an occasional or limited sense of interaction with the writer.
- Writer may seem self-conscious or unwilling to take a risk – may seem to be writing what he/she thinks the reader wants.
- Paper lacks individuality, or the ring of conviction.
- The writing communicates, but only in a routine, predictable fashion that tends to make it blend in with the efforts of others.
- Voice may be inconsistent; it may emerge strongly on occasion, only to shift or even disappear altogether.

Score Point 1: The writer may not have understood the assignment, or may simply have felt indifferent toward the topic. As a result, no clear voice emerges. The result is flat, lifeless, very mechanical and stilted, or possibly inappropriate.

- The reader has no sense that this writer was "writing to be read," and experiences virtually no writer-reader interaction.
- The writing has virtually no individual personality or character; there is no identifiable voice behind the words.
- There is little or no evidence of the writer's involvement in the topic.

Strengths

Voice is the mark of individuality. With respect to this trait, raters look for a paper that stands out from the others, that has a distinctive sound all its own. A writer who projects a strong voice seems to enjoy the act of writing and to get caught up in it. The sense of writer-reader interaction (personal, very direct communication) is strong. In weaker papers, the writer seems simply to be writing to get something down on paper, or else to please the reader, to say what the writer thinks the reader will probably want to hear.

Specifically, the stronger papers tend to be

1. *personal and individual* – a paper with strong voice is unique in style and tone.
2. *communicative*, speaking directly to the reader.

3. *sincere and earnest*, indicating that the writer cares deeply about getting the point across or telling the story effectively.
4. *honest*, digging deep to reveal the writer's true thoughts and feelings about the world.
5. *appealing*; often the reader is truly captivated and sorry to have the paper end.
6. *natural*—never forced, stilted or inhibited.
7. *moving*—capable of evoking a mood or feeling. Papers with very strong voice have the power to evoke a strong personal response (joy, amusement, curiosity, understanding, sympathy, concern, sadness, surprise, delight or whatever) in the reader.

Weaknesses

The weaker papers tend to

1. *rely heavily on generalities*, thus producing the "safe" paper meant to offend no one.
2. *remain on the surface*, never seeming to divulge the writer's true feelings.
3. *hide behind a mask* of expanded cliches, surface details, or a put-on tone (sometimes vulgarity used only for shock value).
4. be consistently *bland or flat.*
5. *sound overstated, preposterous, pretentious* or even downright false.
6. be *inconsistent*, as if the writer couldn't decide whether to produce a formal essay or just chat.
7. *use a tone inappropriate* for the topic or audience—sometimes immature for grade level, sometimes insolent or wholly indifferent.

Sample Papers

Strong papers included the following examples. The last paper is an example of an outstanding natural storyteller at work.

My father gave me a rock last summer and he told me it was magic well I guess I believe him because when I hold it in my hand I remember the good times we had together.

Once my father and I went to California and I had a really good time we talked and I really got to know him because I was able to be his friend instead of his son and he was more like a best friend than a father.

He said to me when he gave me the rock "son, I love you and don't you ever forget me." He has no worry I never will.

In Yestore Your, when Moby Dick was just a tadpole and the seas rolled and thundered over the jettys and onto the shore I searched for my first sand doller still hidden somewhere in the ever

stretching Long Beach Peninsula, which was located in Washington State. Id been going there since I was a little toddler not finding much more than sea wead and empty crab shells, wich were plucked clean by the screeching sea gulls, natures best garbage man. Now I was five, I could run and search on my own, no more holding hands with mom & dad. I could run with the big kids down the beach with the wind roaring in my ears like huge jet engines. I was in search of the still fashionable sand doller that naturally perfect round disc with a dotted star on top and a hole in the center of its flat bottom. While in town the first evening of beachcoming, I spotted just the box I needed for my collection of values to be kept in. It was not just a box, but a red ceder chest approxemetly 4 by 8 inches and designed like a treasure chest. Mom and Dad thought it was just what I needed.

I couldn't wait for morning come and the night went slow. I could hear the waves beconing me through the partially open window in my room. Like counting sheep the waves took there toll.

Clam digging started early before light and my parents went clam digging while the tide was still out, and I looked for shells. I found different kinds of shells, broken crabs, empty clams because the sea gulls got to them first, but still no sand dollers. After lunch mom and dad decided to help me find some sand dollers, but first dad had to stop at a store in Long Beach. Dad left me to go ahead and look for sand dollers with mom. When dad got back he helped me look to. I was looking up and down, around rocks and in tide pools. Then I spotted it, partially sticking out of the sand, I found it, my first sand doller. It was probably the only one on the beach for 50 miles. I put it in my treasure box with sand still sifty seeking through the hole in the bottom. This shell is in my box beside years of awards, pins and buttons from atheletics and scouting. A saber tooth from Hawaii that my Grandpa got for me, and a Swiss army knife I found in the woods of Vancouver where I used to live. These things keep a warm link to my past.

Long Beach, I found out didn't have sand dollers, but the local souviner shop kept them in reserve for when mom and dads would help build up a memory.

It was an early summer morning when mom woke me up and said go set the Barn up for milking". I tried to pretend that I didn't hear her but it didn't work next thing I knew she was running at me with a glass of water and a pancake turner swingin it in the air like a Baseball Bat. It didnt take long for me to get our of that bed and grab my pants but then she through the water all over me and my cloth's then she grabed me and my clothes and threw both of us outside. After I got them on I started to walk down to the barn Jerry my older brother was haying cows I then went to check Ginger our Jersy cow she was ready to calve but when the rest of the cows saw me the tried to run and splattered cow manure all over me when I got to the Back of the barn I saw Ginger laying in her pen with a wet cold ball of fur. Ginger had died while calving but her calf was alright. Ginger was mom's cow so when she died it shook her up plenty. Ma came up with the name Ginweed from the G in gingers name So mom called the calf Ginweed. Ginweed didn't look very good most of the time. Mom thought for sure she was going to die Because she wouldn't eat. But luckily for some reason she made it through the summers heat and winters coldness and Breezzes I was alway's looking for a good show calf and for some reason I knew inside myself this was the calf for me. She finally was old enough to show in the county fair. The date for the fair was august first and this is July 15.

My Birthday is July 20 and Ill be 12. So in those five days I tried to let mom know I needed a show halter without making it sound as if I knew what I was getting for my gift.

July 18 I took Ginweed out and practiced walking her around she wasn't to cooparative and sometimes she got down right mean that made me kinda mad so next she hit me with her head I dubbled up my fist and hit her back but I think it hurt me more that it did her. July 20 finally came and mom let me sleep in till 9 oclock she said thats the least she could do because she couldn't afford anything else. But I knew she was kidding, at least I hope she was after dinner ma brought out a cake with 12 candles on it while they all sang happy birthday. I wished that I would get my Halter for Ginweed. But then I could only blow out 10 candles I thought for sure I wasn't gonna get what I wanted. About that time dad came out and in his hand he had a Black leather halter and chrome colored chain. After I was done with dinner I went out to Ginweeds stall and showed her the halter.

In the other hand I had some cake I think she was more interested in that so I took it and mixed it with some grain and gave it to her then I went in and went to sleep.

July 27 was finally here and I had Just got done washing and Brushing her with my sisters brush and moms dishsoap if ether of them would catch me I would die.

After lunch I took Ginwed to the fair grounds she would stay the night there.

August 1 was a very busy day but I finally got to the fair. Mr Jhonson the Judge. I didnt do much to her that day except got her some food and water I was going to be showing against Judy Brown and her Holstein and Bill Thomason and his Holstein After the show the Judge said "I'm a Holstein man but when you got a Jersy like this it almost makes me want to change Breeds" That Night I slept in the calf house with Ginweed

The next morning came early and when I got up I found Ginweed dead she had hung herself by falling backward on the rope she was tide to. Dad Helped dig her a hole with the tractor I beried her with the Halter and 2 of the 3 ribbons she had one. Later that night I went back to her grave. Ginweed "I said" We had a heck of a good time together. As I walked away from the Grassless Patch of Earth.

This paper represents the mid-point in Voice. It is a solid paper, but the voice is a little forced.

I love my canoe. It has seen me through experiences of fun, fear, and excitement. We have seen and explored many places together.

I remember when we went to North Fork Lake with my family. Along with us came another family with a canoe. Since my canoe has a motor, we pulled the other canoe. As we started pulling upriver my poor canoe tried to go on, but it just couldn't make it.

I recall when we were at Baker Lake in Washington. My brave canoe struggled waves three feet high, taking my family and me end to end of the nine mile long lake. We went in smooth water, murky water, crystal-clear water, and even watter filled logs and weeds. My canoe never failed me.

My mind goes farther back in time, to when we went to Grand Lake in Colorado. It was a lake infested with huge, mean speedboats. Even when it got swamped, my canoe safely brought me back to the dock.

My canoe carried me to the uninhabited wilds of Shadow Mountain Lake in Colorado. It allowed me to see nature in its perfect calm and tranquility, where deer grazed serenely and beavers splashed raucously. Even when a sudden cloud burst came, my patient canoe courageously got me to cover.

My canoe has carried precious cargo, too. At Lost Lake it proudly bore a tiny bundle, my nine-day-old brother, taking him to places never before seen by such a wee little bit of humanity.

Though all of these adventures show how precious my canoe is, there is still one more I must tell.

We were at Clackamette Park in Oregon City when my valiant canoe showed it's true colors. We were chugging up and down the Clackamas River when we decided to try the Willamette. As we neared the place where the two rivers joined, all looked calm. Then we hit the current of the Willamette. My canoe's five-horsepower motor just couldn't fight. And to add to that the motor wasn't running very well that day. I imagine my canoe was just as scared as I was, but instead of panicking like the rest of us, it just kept plugging away. Our canoe saved our lives that day.

How much, you ask, did I pay for this marvelous piece of Fiberglass? In answer I reply, much less then it is worth. Because, you see, I love my canoe.

This paper is an example of one where the voice is weak.

My friend is Rich Schmidtt. We have been friends for four years. I like Rich because we do stuff together like skate bording at Blue Lake we also go swimming in the summer. I value Richs friendship because we both enjoy each others company. We can talk to each other when we have a problem. Rick and I have the same interests in things like bike riding and swimming and pool and skate bording. We both live with out mothers.

Trait 4: Word Choice

Students' average performance statewide on the trait of Word Choice was 3.1 in 1987, just slightly above the level where strengths and weaknesses balance. On this trait, only 28% of the students demonstrated more strengths than weaknesses in their writing—the smallest showing of strong performance for any of the traits (but still up from 20% in 1985). At the same time, however, only 8% revealed more weaknesses than strengths (down from 16% in 1985). A little more that 62% of all the students tested were precisely at the mid-level on this trait.

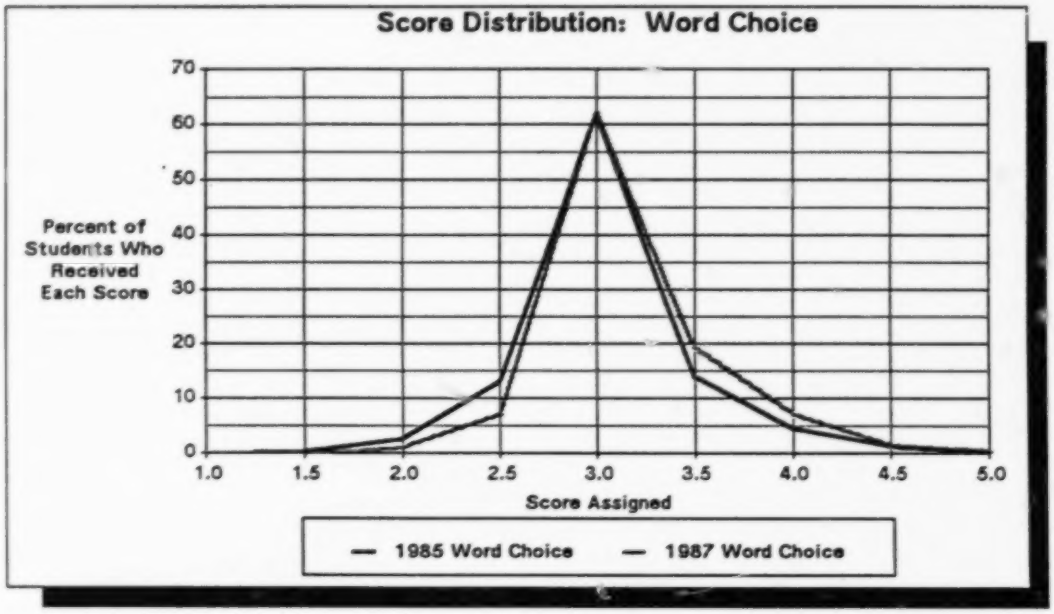

Figure 4

Word choice was the only one of the six traits to reflect such a steep pattern at one score point. Students who scored at mid-level on this trait tended to choose words that were essentially correct and that conveyed meaning adequately, but the language tended to be trite, flat, and ordinary. Such papers were not visually strong, nor was there anything unusual, exciting, or appealing in the way words were used.

Trait Description

Score Point 5: The writer consistently selects words that convey the intended message in an interesting, precise and natural way. The result is full and rich, yet not overwhelming; every word carries its own weight.

- Words are specific, accurate, and suited to the subject. Imagery is strong.

- Lively, powerful verbs give the writing energy, visual appeal, and clarity.
- Vocabulary may be striking, colorful, or unusual—but the language isn't overdone.
- Expression is fresh and appealing, fun to read. The writer uses cliches or slang sparingly, and only for effect.
- The writer may experiment with uncommon words, or use common words in a delightful way.
- Figurative language, if used, is effective.

Score Point 3: The writer's word choice is adequate to convey meaning, but the language tends toward the ordinary. The writer doesn't consistently reach for the "best" way to say something, but instead often settles for the first word or phrase that comes to mind. The result is a sort of "generic paper" that sounds familiar, routine, or commonplace.

- Language communicates quite well, but without a sense of satisfying fullness or power; the reader has the feeling it could have been written better.
- Imagery may be weakened by overuse of abstract, general language.
- Though the reader can interpret the meaning quite readily, some words lack precision or vigor.
- Attempts at the unusual, colorful or difficult are not always successful. The language may seem overdone or calculated to impress rather than natural.
- Though an occasional phrase may catch the reader's eye, cliches, redundancies and hackneyed phrases pop up with disappointing frequency; there are few surprises or enticing twists.

Score Point 1: The writer is struggling with a limited vocabulary, often groping for words and phrases to convey meaning. Meaning may be difficult to determine (e.g., the writer says one thing but seems to mean another), or else the language is so vague and abstract that only the broadest, most general sorts of messages are conveyed.

- Writing is often characterized by monotonous repetition, overwhelming reliance on worn, threadbare expressions, or heavy reliance on the prompt (topic) itself for key words and phrases.
- Imagery is very weak or absent; the reader lacks sufficient concrete details to construct any mental picture.
- Words tend to be consistently dull, colorless and trite.
- In some instances, word choice may seem careless, imprecise, or just plain wrong.

Strengths

The right word at the right moment is the heart of effective word choice. Raters look for a strong, precise vocabulary, but the language should sound natural, not forced, and should seem to suit the writer and the purpose of the paper. Stronger papers may show some flair for colorful or figurative language, but even more often, their strength lies in the writer's knack for using common words well. The result is vivid imagery that lets the reader feel he or she is right there, involved in what is happening.

Specifically, the stronger papers with respect to Word Choice are characterized by

1. *a good vocabulary*—words that sound right, not forced. The student writes to communicate, not to impress.
2. *precision* and a sense of appreciation for the sound and rhythm of words.
3. *a strong "skeleton"* of specific, concrete nouns and energetic verbs—less dependence on long strings of adjectives or adverbs.
4. *avoidance of cliches or jargon,* except for special effect.
5. *a real effort to stretch*, to find a better way or a new way to say it.
6. *vivid imagery* that puts the reader right at the scene.
7. *originality*, an ability to make the reader see the power of everyday words through a fresh twist.
8. *naturalness*—writing that sounds the way the writer would probably tell it if talking right to the reader.
9. *expressive simplicity*—an apparent joy in exploring language.
10. *rich language*—words and phrases that are memorable for conveying meaning in a special way.

Weaknesses

By contrast, the weaker papers with respect to Word Choice were characterized by

1. *monotonous repetition*.
2. *reliance on cliches*.
3. *a weak or sometimes forced vocabulary*—almost as if the student had looked up every other word in a thesaurus (e.g., "He was a friend who could always tell when you were *vivacious* . . . " or "She will always be *conspicuous* to me.").
4. *reliance on abstract words and generalities* that made the student's real thoughts and feelings difficult to understand (e.g., "It was an object that grew meaningful to me through experience . . . ").

5. *carelessness* in the use of language (e.g., "Fred was small for his size" or "My mother's boyfriend, whom I really rancor, moved into our house").
6. *overuse* of words and phrases such as
    - *fun* (a fun person, real fun guy, so fun, very fun—also "funner" and "funnest")
    - *nice*
    - *great* (great time, great personality, a great friend)
    - *awesome* (an awesome friend, awesome time, awesome experience, radically awesome)
    - *rad* (rad time, rad friends, rad skateboards, really rad, super rad, awesomely rad, radically rad)
    - *neat* (really neat, super neat, radically neat)
    - *stuff* (it was radically fun and all that stuff)
    - *massive* (we had a massive time, invited massive friends over)
    - *always there for me* (he/she was always there for me)
    - *sweet* (she was sweet, so sweet, very sweet)
    - *helpful* (she/he was always helpful and really helped me)
    - *couch potato* (he/she was a real couch potato)
    - *gross* (he/she/it was really gross)
    - *whoa* (huh, whoa—really gross)
    - *. . . has become my whole life* (my horse, teddybear, skateboard has become my whole life)

Sample Papers

Among the papers exhibiting strengths in Word Choice are these two examples.

I'm me, & the person I am here & now is not only the result of my genetic heridity, but also because of the environmental influences in my life. The objects which make up my environment have varying degrees of importance, but each impacts my life in some way & the absence of any one would change a facet of my personality.

There are many things I cherish because of meanings or memories they hold, & there are a few people & even fewer animals I truly love.

I cherish a few special poems that I've heard or read over the years, a silk shawl from the 1800's that has been handed down through my family, my dad's violin, some tapes of my favorite songs, & my diaries.

I love my family & friends & my dog, Charley, my cat, Puff, & my horse, Daisy.

But of all the tangible objects in my life that I value, I most value books. All my life I have been surrounded by books. My mom says "a house with books is well-furnished," and has made sure there are always books available to all of us.

I value books because when I read I can go anyplace, be anyone, do anything, learn anthing that I want to. Through books I have visited the secret annex with Anne Frank, lived on a cay with Phillip and Timothy, been a 19th century governess with Jane Eyre, loved & cared for animals with James Herriot, & witnessed nuclear destruction in Hiroshima.

When I'm sad I read & and when I'm happy I read. I read when I want to learn something and I read when I want to forget my troubles.

In "Fahrenheit 451," Ray Bradbury talks about books being the memory & conscience of a people. I believe that books are even more than that. I believe that they are the very soul of humankind.

I'm usually searching in my pockets for my grandfather's knife. I have it with me a great part of the time, but sometimes I leave it in my pockets and find it in the dirty clothes basket when I suddenly need it. It reminds me of my grandfather who passed away. The more I look at it the more I realize why he chose such a great tool. It stays sharp and the blade opens and closes, no matter how many times I fall down in the mud, bottom first, with it in my back pocket.

Its dimpled, brown handle and slender blade was definitely something grandfather picked out. It's beyond price and I hope I won't ever lose it. It seems unlikely because the knife is never left unforgotten or undetected for too long. Just as Grandfather remembered me by coming to my Grandparents' Day at school, I remember him just as well.

Grandfather was one of those people, who after seeing a long line, would casually walk up to the middle and sort of blend in. However, he never directly treated anyone unfair. Just like his knife he was sharp and he got the best out of life.

I like having the honor of having my Grandfather's knife. It's not like the more I think of it the more I think of his passing, but I remember his love and the admiration I had for him and the love he had for me.

This paper is a good example of the vast majority of the papers in the sample.

One of the many things that I posess is a blanket that I had when I was a little girl. I cherrished this blanket so much I would never leave it at home when we went somewhere, and I would never leave it anywhere.

This blanket had bunnys, dogs, and cats on it. Sometimes when I am holding It, It Reminds me of my mom. She would alway hug me whenever I was sad, or depressed. There was a stuffed bunny that I would always carry with my blanket. It looked just like the one that was on my blanket.

I cherrished this until I was seven years old. The neat thing was, Is that my sister and my brother had the same animal and blanket when they were kids.

When I was seven years old I thold my mom that I wanted to get rid of my stuffed animal and Blanket. She acted really happy at First, but then she really tried talking me out of it but I told her that I was getting to old to have it, and she understood. I told my mom I didn't want her to throw it a way and she didn't. We still have them, and I think we are going to have them for a long time. My mom said she wants to keep it for grandkids. We have one now but he's not old enough to play with them.

Sometimes I still get the old things out. Only when I get bored or depressed. When I get them out my sister says you still use those things they are so old. I don't care. One day I caught my sister getting the blanket and Bunny Rabbit out and I said the baby's getting out her bunny and he blanket out and she said shut up!

Done by [name]

These two examples are among the relatively few papers where weaknesses outnumbered strengths. Some weak papers used dull, flat language. These, on the other hand, are inflated and overwritten.

Everyone has an object they love. A teddy bear, a special toy, or an object that has special meaning to them. I have my ballet shoes.

Ballet toe slippers remind people of the grace and elegance of a ballet dancer. Whenever I slip my feet into them I feel like I'm in another world. A world of my own. Filled with grace and beauty. Where animals and people glide like swans adrift on a calm stream. With the poise and

soft, warm greeting that it gives you. I find complete tranquility that surrounds everyone and everything. Making them aware of life but at the same time quite distant from reality. Living in a world that survives only one's memory and deep down in the heart of their heart. When I'm cascading across the fullness of the oak floor, I feel myself taken by the great passion of the dance. Being carried by my own love and imagination. I see myself, not a a girl in a pair of shoes dancing around, but as the peddles of a flower. Drifting and fluttering and playing in the warmth and succurness of the soft wind. Nothing makes me feel as peaceful and loved as when I'm dancing in my ballet slippers.

It's huge, but by some standards small. It's the capitol of California, but more than that it's a piece of America. By that I mean a mixture of race, beliefs and states of mind. Like a plant it's always growing, for better or worse. Its like a kind of concrete jungle teeming with exotic and dangerous life.

Almost all areas of it are dangerous, because of the fact its infected with an "animal" called crime. And so well saturated is it with this "animal" that it is impossible to remove totally. While police work to the "animal" down the other life learns to accept the "animal" as part of their world.

But the Jungle always has a brighter side. You must live their to see it though, because its not easy to spot, its usually a small place made up of closely knit homes or apartments where the life forms have learned to get along with the other and understand them. This is ths place to be in the Jungle, a framiliar place to feel safe in. A place to enjoy fellow life forms and a kind of peace.

With lights and life, building and street, such is the Jungle of the city.

Trait 5: Sentence Structure

The average score on this trait was 3.2, again revealing slightly more strengths than weaknesses. Of those students tested in 1987, 43% scored in the mid-range. More than a third—40%—revealed more strengths than weaknesses on this trait (versus 33% in 1985); and only 16% revealed more weaknesses than strengths (down from 24% in 1985).

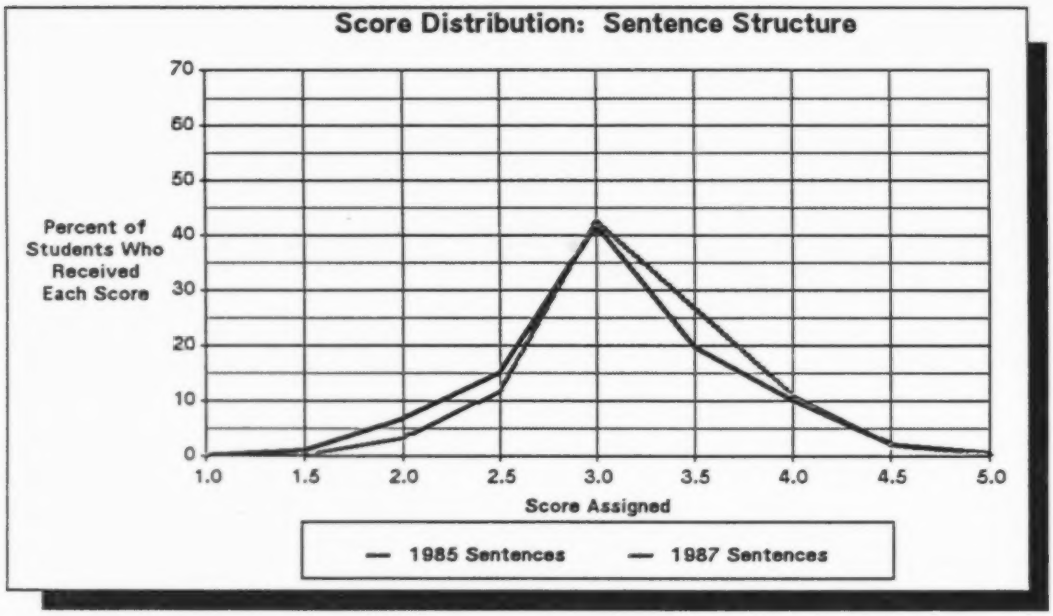

Figure 5

Trait Description

Score Point 5: The paper is fluid, and reads easily throughout. It has an easy-on-the-ear flow and rhythm when read aloud. Sentences have a strong and rhetorically effective structure that makes reading enjoyable.

- Sentence structure clearly conveys meaning, with no ambiguity.
- Writing sounds natural and fluent, with effective phrasing.
- Sentences are appropriately concise.
- Varied sentence structure and length add interest.
- Fragments, if used, are stylistically appropriate. They seem right.

Score Point 3: Sentences are understandable, but tend to be mechanical rather than fluid. While sentences are usually correct, the paper is not characterized by a natural fluency and grace. Occasional flaws or awkward constructions may necessitate re-reading.

- Sentence structure sometimes clearly conveys meaning-and sometimes not. Structural problems may sometimes create ambiguity.
- Some sentences lack energy, character or effectiveness (e.g., they may be hampered by awkward structure, unnecessary complexity, roundabout expression, wordiness, dangling modifiers, ineffective use of passive voice, or repetitious beginnings—"I did this," "I did that").
- Sentence variety (length or structure) tends to be more the exception than the rule.
- Fragments, if used, may sometimes be ineffective or confusing.

Score Point 1: The writing is generally awkward and therefore hard to read aloud. It does not sound natural. Sentences tend to be choppy, incomplete, or so rambling and irregular that it may be difficult to tell where one should end and the next begin.

- Because sentence structure frequently does not function to convey meaning, reader may pause several times to question what is meant.
- Sentences lack both fluency and correctness. The writer may not write in conventional sentences at all. Or, sentences may seem stiffly constructed, disjointed, endlessly meandering (e.g., many run-ons), or nonsensical.
- Short, choppy sentences relentlessly monotonous rhythms or patterns (e.g., subject-verb or subject-verb-object over and over) that produce a jarring or sing-song effect.
- Fragments are confusing or ineffective. Writer seems to have little grasp of how words fit together, or of where one idea logically stops and the next begins.

Strengths

In rating sentence structure, raters often read papers aloud, listening to the flow and rhythm of the language: How does it "play" to the ear when you put it all together? Raters look not only for correctness, but also for grace, fluency and power. Stronger papers are characterized by direct, energetic sentences free of such problems as wordiness, awkward sentence patterns, dangling modifiers, nonparallel construction and so forth.

Specifically, the stronger papers with respect to Sentence Structure tend to

1. *sound fluent*—to have an "easy on the ear" flow and rhythm when read aloud.
2. *show some variety* in sentence length and structure.

3. *move easily* from one sentence to another, with smooth, well handled transitions.
4. *use fragments effectively*, if at all. (Fragments, if stylistically effective, were considered acceptable. Professional writers do, after all, use fragments. Thus, raters simply asked, "Does it work?")
5. *show "sentence sense"* – a real awareness of how sentences are put together, and of where one sentence should stop and the next begin.
6. *be extremely easy to read* – either silently or aloud.
7. *have a natural phrasing and rhythm* that emulates effective oral speech patterns.

Weaknesses

The weaker papers, by contrast, tend to

1. *contain awkward constructions* that made reading difficult.
2. *jar the reader* with awkward or unnatural rhythms.
3. *sound disjointed, awkward, or rambling.*
4. *wander aimlessly* with little indication of where one sentence should stop and the next begin.
5. *bump along with short, choppy sentences* – or drone endlessly via one long unpunctuated sentence.
6. *repeat sentence patterns* (subject-verb or subject-verb-object) with monotonous regularity.
7. *contain some irregular word patterns* that reveal a lack of "sentence sense" – that is, little feeling for how words naturally fit together to form sentences.
8. *require re-reading* because the way the words are strung together obscures the ideas.

Sample Papers

This paper is a good example of a strong writing sample in the Sentence Structure trait.

> In my old, battered black wallet I carry man y things. A letter from a friend. My lunch ticket. My social security card. Many other tidbits and items as well. There is one thing however, which I prize above all my poessions. It is a photograph. It's small, and the photographer was not good. That does not matter. What matters is the person in the photograph. His name is Brian Sizemore . . .
>
> We first met almost two years ago, when I moved to Umatilla. It was my first day, and the school was the largest I had ever been to. I was nervous.

I walked into my first class slightly late. I took a seat. Looking around, I noticed several people staring at me. I don't like to be stared at, so I was uncomfortable.

Since it was the first day of junior high, the teacher took it easy on us. We played a game of what is called Trivial Pursuit. The room was divided in half for teams.

The person behind me, a muscular blond guy, made polite conversation. When a question came to him, he answered it correctly. "Guess how I knew that," he challenged. I confessed I didn't know. "We have the game at home," he said, grinning widely. "I've had that question before.". .

So, that little picture is my prized possession. It reminds me of my best friend and his family. Whenever I see it, I think of Brian. And then I laugh. Brian Sizemo, you're quite a friend.

These two papers represent those at the mid-point on the scoring scale. The second paper represents a real balance of strengths and weaknesses in the Sentence Structure trait. It has some very nice syntax as well as some rough spots.

I think the important thing in my life is my snake. I love my snake. I got him when I was about two or three years old. A friend of my grandfather gave him to us. My grandpa's friend was an animal dealer. He had just got a shipment of different kinds of snakes in. When he brought it over he told my grandpa that since he was such a good friend he had a surprise for him. He also told grandpa to wait in the house while he got it out of the car. When he came back into the house he pulled out of his pocket a ten inch boa constrictor. That was about twelve years ago. That snake has become part of my life.

From first grade I've been bringing my favorite pet to school once a year. I'm now in the eighth grade. My snake is about ten feet long. He's still growing. I checked a book out of the library that told me he would grow to about fourteen or fifteen feet long.

In all my years of owning him he has only bit me twice. Once it was my fault. I was just a little kid then and I had this thing about tails. I kept picking up the snake's tail and he would strike. Well, one time he got me, it didn't hurt much. It just scared me. The second time a group of kids were over looking at the animals. I brought out the snake and all the kids gathered around. There was thirteen or fourteen kids there. The snake started to panic and he just started stricking at everything that moved. The only one he hit was me. I put him up.

I like to drive the girls nuts with him. In fourth grade I took him into this one class room and a girl started screaming and ran to the back of the room. I really had fun that day.

I forgot to mention that he weighs about thirtyfive pounds.

Every time I see a cow it reminds me of one particular time I went cow chasing.

I was about 11 years old and it was the first day of spring break. Some of my friends and I decided it would be fun to go camping. We talked it over with my dad and he agreed to take us camping at the Linder's farm.

Now the Linder's farm wasn't any regular farm. It was like a big forest, except it had cows on it. They were not regular cows to us they were big, mean, ugly, and an adventure.

Once camp got set up we started out on our Journey. After a bit of hiking we found our prey. He was an ugly cuss with yellow fur, big brown eyes, little stubs for horns, and bald spots all over.

After about 20 min. we had somehow caught him. Once we caught him we looked around at each other wondering what we should do with him. finaly they decided I should ride him and I quickly agreed to the honor.

They helped me up on to his back. Gosh he had a boney back and it was hurting my butt already. I sat on it for a while and it wouldn't budge. Somehow they got the bright idea to start throwing rocks at it.

Now the thing was moving, fast! My but was now aching from pain as I bounced up and down on its back. Just then I threw myself off and didn't get up for a long time.

I have never chased a cow since then. If you ever have to chose to ride or not to ride a cow or bull don't.

This paper is one that is weak in Sentence Structure.

I remember when I was five years old. I wanted a Bike. I wanted a Bike Becaise all of my freinds had a Bike and I didn't So I kept asking my dad for a Bike then he finally said he would get me one as soon as he got his first check it was a week untill he got his check. then the next mounning my mom woke me up for school and she told me to watch out Becaise it was friday the thirteenth and my mom said bad things happen on friday the thirteenth so I was careful all day so I wouldn't get in trouble so I would get my Bike I made it through school and then at the end of the day I was getting ready to get on the bus and I forgot somethy in the school, I remembr it was in my classroom and I had to run back in and get it when I Back I missed my bus so I didn't know what to do becaise we didn't have a phone so I decided to go to the office in the school and they said that my parents would have to laeve an emergency phone number It was my uncles number my uncle came and picked me up and said that he would take me home. On the way home he asked what happened in school why I missed the bus and I told him the whole story then we were home and I thought I was in big trouble so I walked slow in to the house and my dad started yelling at me and told me to go to my bedroom I was grounded so I went to my bedroom and there was a new bike I went out and rode it all nigh with my frends and I haven't forget that day yet.

Trait 6: Conventions

Average performance statewide on this trait was once again 3.2, the most common score achieved in 1987. Half of the students tested revealed more strengths than weaknesses in their performance (up significantly from 23% in 1985). Interestingly, though, more than one paper in five (22%) revealed more weaknesses than strengths (down from 30% in 1985); Conventions and Organization were the only traits for which such large numbers of weaknesses were identified. For 27% of the students tested, strengths and weaknesses were in balance.

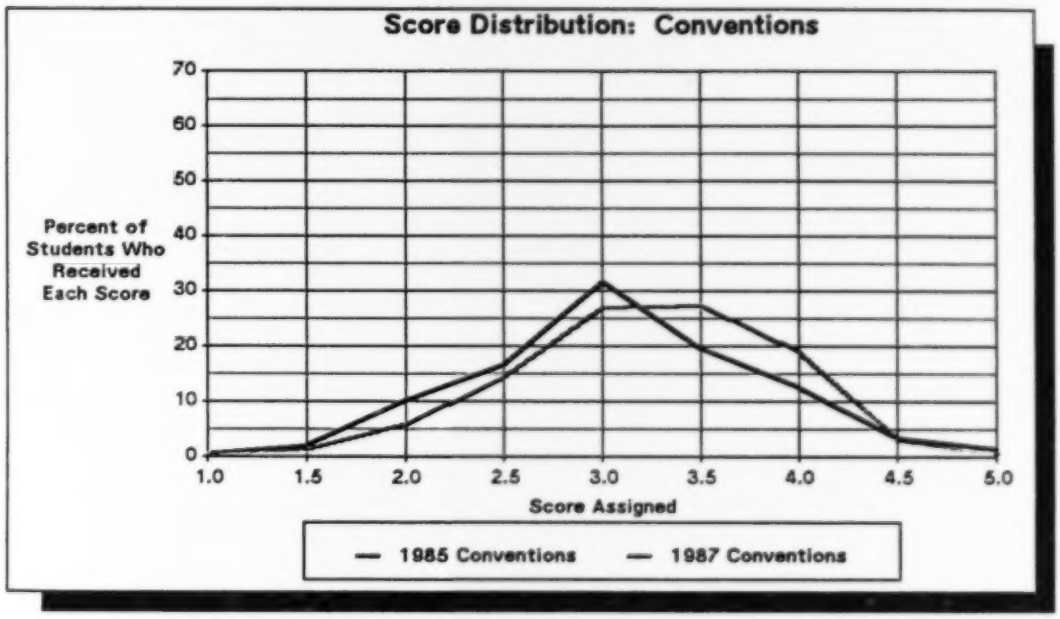

Figure 6

Trait Description

Score Point 5: The writer's skillful use of standard writing conventions (grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, paragraphing) enhances readability. There are no glaring errors. In fact, while the paper may not be flawless, errors tend to be *so* minor that the reader can easily overlook them unless searching for them specifically. (Deliberate, controlled deviations from convention-in dialogue, for instance-are acceptable, provided they enhance the overall effect.)

- Grammar (e.g., noun-verb agreement; noun-pronoun agreement; verb tense; forms of nouns, verbs, pronouns and modifiers) is essentially correct.

- Punctuation is smooth and enhances meaning. Informalities, such as dashes or contractions, are allowed.
- Spelling is generally correct, even on more difficult words.
- Usage is generally correct, or acceptable given the purpose of the writing. The writer avoids double negatives (e.g., *couldn't hardly*) and nonstandard usage (e.g., *could of* been, *more better*, she *had ought* to do it, *irregardless*, *leave me* figure this out). Informalities (e.g., *you will find* rather than the more formal *one will find*) are acceptable.
- Paragraphing (i.e., indenting) works in harmony with the inherent organization of the paper.

Score Point 3: Errors in writing conventions are noticeable and begin to impair readability. Reader can follow what is being said overall, but may need to pause or re-read on occasion.

- Occasional problems in grammar disrupt the flow of the writing. For example, agreement may be inconsistent; or there may be shifts in tense, improper verb forms (e.g., *lay down* here), improper pronoun forms (*theirselves*, *me and Jim* will go), use of adjectives for adverbs (he did *good*), and so on.
- Punctuation, capitalization and spelling errors may be sufficiently frequent or serious to momentarily distract the reader.
- Some usage problems (e.g., double negatives, use of nonstandard expressions such as *irregardless*) may be evident.
- Paragraphing is attempted, but paragraphs may not always begin at the right places. As a result, paragraph structure (indenting) does not always complement the paper's inherent organization.

Score Point 1: Numerous errors in usage and grammar, spelling, capitalization and/or punctuation consistently distract the reader, taking attention away from the writer's message and severely impairing readability.

- The student shows very limited understanding of or ability to apply conventions.
- Errors in grammar and usage are frequent and tend to be very noticeable.
- Basic punctuation may be omitted, haphazard, or just plain wrong.
- Capitalization is often incorrect or highly inconsistent.
- Spelling errors tend to be frequent, even on common words.
- Paragraphing is illogical or arbitrary (e.g., paragraphs almost never seem to begin in the right places.)

An Explanation of How Conventions Are Scored

Notice that this trait covers grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, and paragraphing. In reviewing the results, it is important to be aware that raters did not count errors or make marks of any kind on the papers during scoring. There are several reasons for this:

1. Marks made by one rater on the paper inevitably bias other raters who review the paper.
2. Counting errors is extremely time consuming, and can literally double the cost of the assessment.
3. It is virtually impossible to achieve high interrater consistency regarding the specific number of errors present in a piece of writing because raters do not share the same priorities (one attends closely to spelling, another to punctuation, and so on), and do not always agree (not even the most up-to-date English handbooks always agree) on what is correct or acceptable.
4. In order to achieve fairness with error counts, one must also count the number of words in each student's paper. Otherwise, a student who writes three pages, and has more opportunity to make errors, will tend to be penalized in comparison to the student who writes only a short paragraph and has little opportunity for error.
5. Error-count approaches tend to penalize the student who takes a risk. Suppose two students are writing in response to the same task, for example, and neither knows how to use quotation marks correctly—but one attempts it and the other doesn't. One student will have "errors" for trying something a bit beyond her/his control. The other student's paper will not show that error, but the level of attempt will be less.
6. Most important (practical considerations aside), there is no empirical evidence to support the theory that counting and marking errors on a student's paper will improve that student's writing.

In this assessment, therefore, Conventions were scored as a function of *readability*—that is to say, the relative ease with which the reader could get through the paper. At the 5.0 level, conventions actually enhance readability. The paper does not have to be flawless, but the writer does need to demonstrate a good grasp of writing conventions that helps make the paper extremely easy to read and understand. It may help to think of it this way: a 5.0 paper (with respect to Conventions) is sufficiently polished (or very nearly so) to be ready for inclusion in a school anthology of student writing with little or no additional editing needed.

At the 3.0 level, problems with conventions become noticeable and impair readability somewhat. It is still relatively easy to decipher meaning, but an occasional sentence might require re-reading, or an occasional misspelled word might need to be sounded out before it can be identified. In general, though, the reader can move along at a fairly fast—if bumpy—pace. A 3.0 paper would require

moderate editing and polishing before it could be considered ready for inclusion in a school anthology.

At the 1.0 level, errors are so abundant that the paper is truly difficult to read. Virtually every sentence requires re-reading or slow going. Errors jump out at the reader, and are consistently distracting. Spelling errors tend to be frequent, even on simple words. Punctuation tends to be haphazard, wrong, or missing altogether. Paragraphing also tends to be haphazard or absent. Grammatical problems are common. Capitals are used incorrectly or inconsistently. The reader must pause frequently to puzzle over meaning or simply to decipher and decode, and some words or phrases may be hard to make out even after careful scrutiny. A 1.0 level paper would require extensive editing before it could be published in a school anthology of student writing.

Some Important Reminders About Conventions Scores

There are some additional considerations which need to be taken into account when evaluating the Conventions scores:

1. Handwriting was NOT considered in scoring Conventions. That is, a paper with very poor handwriting might be difficult to read, but if the conventions were well handled (and this was often the case), the paper was not scored down.

2. Papers that were essentially correct, but showed only the most modest level of attempt (e.g., no quotation marks, no complex or compound sentences, no variety in end punctuation—periods only) generally received 4s. One could not fairly say that errors impaired readability; they did not. Yet it was the consensus of the group of raters that such a paper did not merit as high a score as the paper in which the writer attempted more difficult constructions and generally succeeded.

3. Papers that were flawless mechanically were not necessarily strong papers in other respects. It often happened that a paper which received very high scores on Conventions tended to be rather weak in Ideas and Content and in Voice. Similarly, papers that were very strong in Ideas and Content and in Voice were not necessarily strong in Conventions. It is important to be aware of such differences in interpreting the data. Typically, such differences will not be made clear in holistic scoring. And in fact, a mechanically flawless paper may have a strong advantage in a holistic system because it tends to create a positive first impression that may bias the reader's view about the quality of the paper as a whole. On the other hand, a mechanically flawed paper may negatively bias a reader in much the same way. One of the primary advantages in analytical scoring is its capacity to identify for us the positive-negative contrasts within each paper, reminding us that a writer who does one thing very well will not necessarily do everything well.

Sample Papers

This paper exhibited a strong control of conventions. It is interesting to note, though, that it is not very strong in Ideas and Content or Voice.

The Window I Broke

Every time I see the bill for the window I broke, it reminds me of the great time I had at Sun River during summer vacation. It also reminds me of the friends I met there, and the places I went while in Sun River.

Going to Sun River wirh my friends, Brad and Marc, was the highlight of my summer vacation. It was great because we were staying in our own condo, and we never saw our parents. It was the best vacation I've ever had. The only bad part was when I accedently broke our window trying to hit a tennis ball. The best part was at night in the mall. That's where we found out where all the parties were.

The people I met there made the trip so good. We made about 50 friends in all. Most of the people we met were at the mall, parties, and at Sergeant Rock's, a teenage dance club. It's fun when you know almost every person there!

The bill also reminds me of all the different places we went in Sun River. One of the best was Sergeant Rock's, where we went almost every night. Besides Sergeant Rock's, we went to a lot of parties at really nice houses. The swimming pool and the mall were our other major hangouts. We went to alot of weird places while we were there.

Memories of summer vacation, our comrades at Sun River, and the different buildings we visited while there, all come back to me when I see the bill for the broken window.

These two represent balanced strengths and weaknesses in the Conventions trait.

An Important Object

An important object in my life are my friends. I, even though am not pleasd with their actions sometimes, love all of my friends. I try to keep from getting angry at them; so that they can be at ease.

Though several of my friends are angry with me, I can honestly say I don't hate them. The reason behind this statement, is because they have all done so much for me. They have helped me to learn, to grow, and most of all they have helped to improve my personality.

To explane what my friends mean to me is very difficult, because of what they have done for me. I would probably kill or be killed for the insurance of my friends safety and well-being.

Though I don't understand what they mean by what they say, I can't say I hate them. Though I don't see why they do some of the things they do, I still love them.

In the long run my friend are my friends and allway will be. As far as I'm coserned.

As the twilight faded and the first ray of sunshine peaked over the mountains a lone rider rode onto the dusty street of Diablo. He got down and tied his horse to the hitching post outside the tavern and walked in.

Now anyone who whas watching would notice that every few minutes he would take out a gold pocket-watch and look at it sort of sorrowfully.

Inside the tavern there werent very many people. Just the boys from the double Y, a gambler, and the town drunk.

The stranger was a tall handsome man with broad shoulders and thin hips. All you could see of his face beneeth the Black Stetson Hat was a long handlebar mustache and a protruding chin.

He went up to the bar and asked for a shot of whiskey. He turned around and looked around. His dark eyes missing nothing. He took out the watch and glanced at the picture in the inside.

Now, the double Y boys are a mean lot and would pick a fight with anyone. So "Slick" Sam leaned over and started to reach for the strangers watch. And then decided against it when he noticed He was looking into the dark barrel of a colt 44. He backed up and his face turned red with anger and embarressment.

Something inside Sam told him not to go for his gun But Sams pride had been hurt and he went for his gun. Just as he brought it clear of the leather holster he felt the first slug hit him throwing his body back against the wall. Sam lay there trying to bring his gun up in a feeble attempt and then everything went black.

The next day the stranger rode out of town. And still today as the story is told around campfires people wonder what it was that was so special about the strangers watch.

This paper is one where control of conventions was weak.

"Something strang happened"

My Mom and Dad and me were going to go on a trip this summer to hawaii, and we were going to take a boat around to look at the different islands', but we found out we were going to leave sooner becuase my grandma that lived up their called us and she said she keeps hearing strange noises, and she said the other night she seen somthing that looked like a flying saucer land wright out in the middle of her field, but when she whent out there she didn't see anything, she was kind of scared about it, so she whanted us to come up there today, and if we did i would miss alot of schoolwork, so i asked my mom if we were going to go.? and she said yes, she told me to get my clothes' packed, so i did, and we were off to the airport, When we got there we bought three tickets which costed $250.00, I thought that was alot of money for airplane tickets, then i thought for a minute the price of everything is going up, so after all of that junk, we finally aboarded the airplane, and the stewertist yeld over the inercome "plase fasten your seatbelts"! I didn't hesitate for a minute i put that seatbelt on and buckled it up tight. Then all of a sudden we lifted off from the ground,. Hours later we reached hawaii, and then we called the cab company to get a cab down at the airport, the cab finally arrived, he picked us up and took us to my grandma's house we paid the cab, and then we slowly walked up to the door and nocked but nobody answered, i was a frad somthing strange might of happened.

The following papers are reprinted to illustrate the striking difference that can occur between Conventions on the one hand (which range from moderately to quite weak in these cases), and Ideas and Content (strong) and Voice (strong) on the other.

I once lived in Cullaby Lake, I had lots of friends their. We had a slue going through our back yard that we swim in or fish in. You could catch bass, catfish, bluegills, or crapie. Their was two parks with a big lake that we could swim or fish in. There was a big park and a little one so that's what we called them. We had big truck innertubes that we flotted arround in and we would dive to the bottom of the Lake and get a bunch of lake grass and throw at eachother. We took them to an old truck garage that had a big field around it, and race their. We rode on trails that took us up in the mountians. We always found beaver dams Blocking streams on the side of the trails. And sometimes we would swim in the streams and find frogs and frog eggs. I hatched frog eggs once and had atleast 200 tad poles and only a few turned into frogs.

One of my friends had a putting green in his back yard and we would spend a whole day putting. His front yard had alot of trees and a big hill. We would always play hide'n go seek and play army with toy guns and walkie-talkies. We took our tonka dumptrucks and roll down the hill in his front yard. His house would have hornet nests built on the side of it so we would throw rocks at them and run. Their was a field across the street from my house and we would make kites to fly their. We made bike ramps and see who could jump the farthest.

I went wood cutting with a friend once. While his dad was cutting wood we were running throug the forest, and I fell in quick-sand. My friend thought it was funny, I guess he didn't know what

was happening and he wouldn't help me out. I grabbed onto a log and pulled myself up. I had to ride in the back of the truck on the way home.

My dad and me made a backboard and bought a basket ball hoop, and ball. We played horse and around the world alot.

We made crawdad pots and caught crawdads in the slue in our backyard. Sometimes in the morning we would find crawdads in our grass. We had a dog named brandy. She always wined to go outside and when we let her out she would look for crawdads and eat them.

We did lots of fun things when I lived there, and I really miss living there.

I went back to see some old friends last summer and I don't want to live their that much anymore. Things have changed, its packed with houses. I guess I like where I live now more than I thought

---

Living with my grandparents has really been an experience. My grandmother is just like a mom to me, as a matter of fact I call her mom. I have lived with my grandparents scence I was two years old. Many things have happened, Like when I accidentally sat on an ant pile and got ants in my pants. Or when I threw the car keys and they fell in the flower garden and I had to go to bed without supper. Or when my sister ran into our next door neighbors car. Once before that I fell on my head and cracked my scul.

The way I came to live with my grandparents was my parents got split up. My mom went to Germany and got married to another guy named Bob. My dad lives in Selma, Idaho but he never did get maried again. He comes over once in a long while and plays chess or takes my sister and I to a movie.

He has never been very succesfull with his audo mechanics job. He has been ribed off many times, he got a wielder stole plus a really nice and shiny red car and some fire wood that he worked so hard to chop so he wouldn't get cold during the winter.

My grandmother always lets me bring friends over on the weekend and she is really nice to me. I live really close to my other grandma but she only visits me when somthing is wrong or on a special occasion like Christmas. She is a nice lady too. I don't know what happened to her husband.

The grandmother that I live with is really quite funny. She drives slow and goes to Tops, a weight loss program.

Living with her is sometimes a real pain. After she has been dieting she is really grouchy. Although I am glad I live with my grandparents or I wouldn't have a chance to play the piano.

My grandpa is seventy-six years old. I know he is old but he works on our rentails like a twenty years old. He has taught me everything I know and I am really proud of him.

Chapter 3:
Substudies Comparing 1985 and 1987

Overall, average scores in 1987 equalled or surpassed scores for 1985 across all traits. The question is, do such differences reflect real improvement in performance, or are other factors influencing the scores? In order to help answer that question, two substudies were conducted in 1987 to determine whether differences in scores from 1985 and 1987 might be partially attributable to either

1. differences in the way the teams for 1985 and 1987 were rating papers, or
2. differences in the way students responded to the prompts for 1985 and 1987.

To address the first issue, the 1987 team scored a set of approximately 500 papers that had been scored by the 1985 team. Scores were then compared to determine whether there were any significant differences on any trait. There were not. In other words, scoring patterns for the 1985 and 1987 teams were highly consistent. The following graph shows how the scores for the two teams compared:

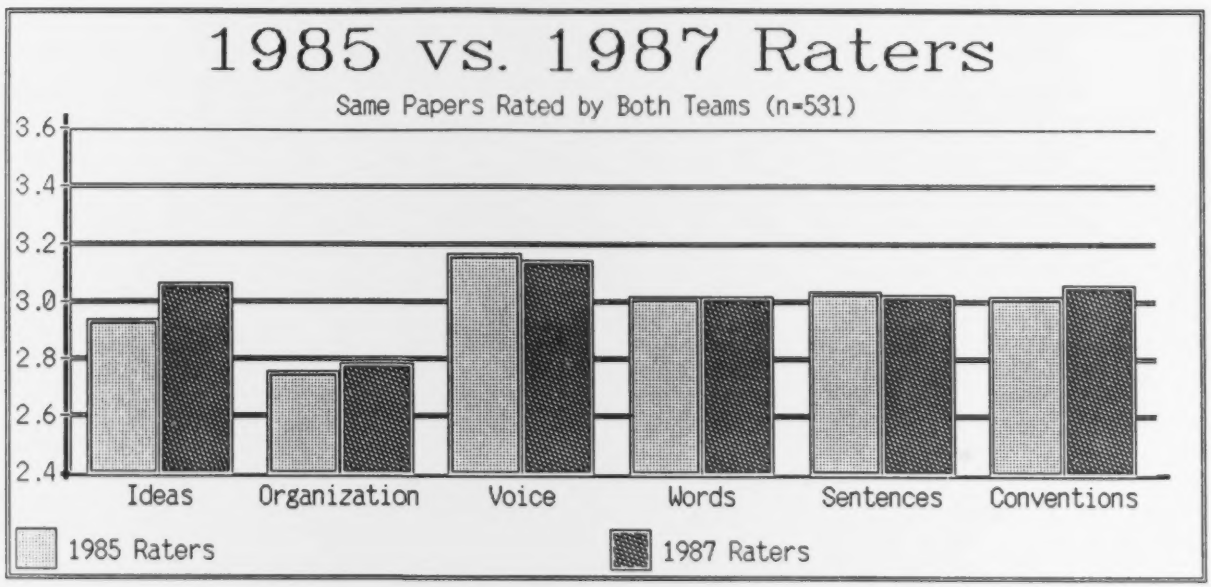

Figure 7

To address the second issue, a random sample of approximately 300 students who participated in the 1987 assessment were asked to write on both the 1985 and the 1987 prompts. About half the students wrote on the 1985 prompt first; about half wrote on the 1987 prompt first. Then the aggregate scores for each prompt were compared. Without exception, the average scores were higher for the 1987 prompt. The following graph shows average scores across the six traits for each of the two prompts:

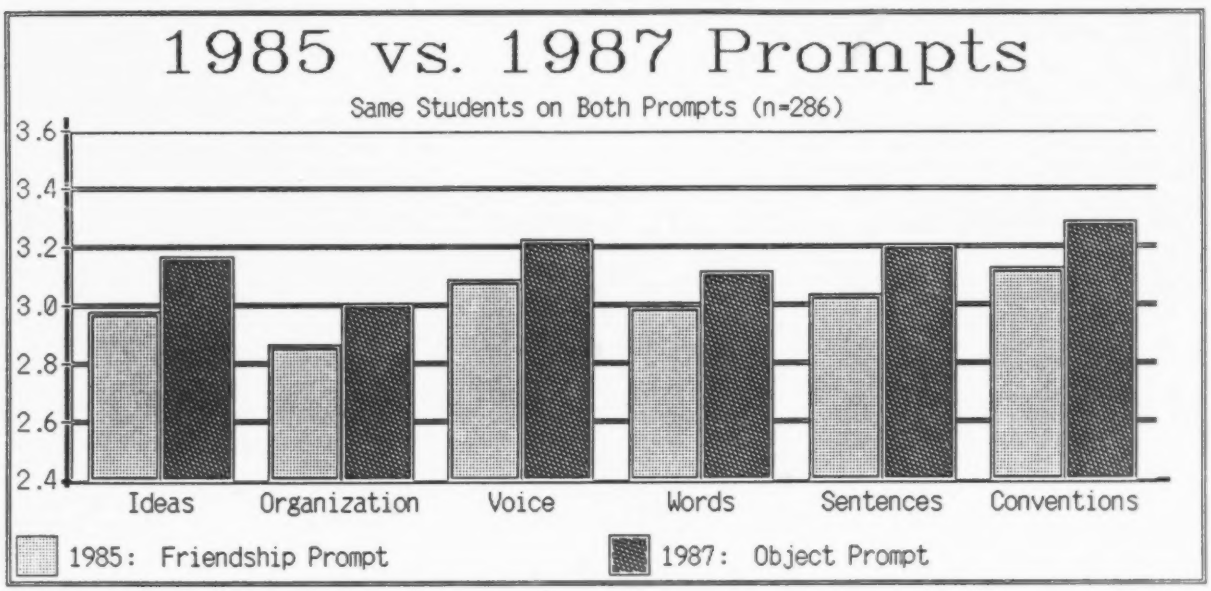

Figure 8

The result of this substudy supported the hypothesis formed during the October 1986 pilot test of the 1987 assessment procedures: that the object prompt used in 1987 resulted in higher average scores than the friendship prompt used in 1985. But the pilot test procedures were different from those used in the substudy; in the pilot, a random portion of each participating classroom wrote on the friendship prompt while another random portion wrote on the object prompt. To ensure that these procedures didn't account for the score differences, the *same* students wrote on *both* prompts in the substudy. The results, however, were the same. In the pilot, "object" scores ranged from .06 to .24 higher across the six traits; in the substudy, they ranged from .12 to .19 higher. Thus, it is fairly conclusive that the change in prompt from 1985 to 1987 accounted for at least some of the apparent improvement in student writing.

In conclusion, the differences in performance from 1985 to 1987 cannot be attributed to differences in the way the rating teams scored papers; the teams for the two years performed very consistently. However, it is also clear that students did respond differently to the two prompts; on the average, students who wrote on both prompts received higher scores on the 1987 object prompt across all traits than on the 1985 friendship prompt. This does not mean that all notable improvements in performance are attributable to differences in the prompts. It does suggest, however, that the prompt for 1987 probably offered students a better chance to display their best writing skills than did the prompt for 1985.

Chapter 4:
Factors Affecting Student Performance

Countless factors can affect a student's performance, and though we can only hypothesize about what factors may have been most important for this assessment, a brief review of potential influences may assist you in interpreting the data for an individual student—or for a school or the state as a whole.

1. The Prompt

For some students, the prompt may have seemed too structured or may simply not have touched a responsive chord. For others, quite the opposite could have been true. In the absence of teacher-directed prewriting and peer response activities, it may be difficult for some students to demonstrate their best writing. Unfortunately, though, it is not possible for formal assessments to incorporate such activities on a statewide basis because there is no means for ensuring consistency in the way that they are handled. Without such assurance of consistency from one classroom to another, some students would inevitably have an advantage if prewriting and peer review were incorporated.

2. Attitude

Both the attitude of the teacher in the classroom and the attitude of the student have direct bearing on performance. If the attitude is notably positive and enthusiastic, that is often reflected in the quality of the writing, and the willingness to try something new. Teachers who fear that results will be used for teacher evaluation (which they will *not*) may feel unnecessarily anxious about the exercise, and their anxiety can, unfortunately, be transferred to student writers.

3. Understanding of the Exercise

Every effort was made to standardize test administration procedures and to provide clear instructions that would help students do their best (See the Appendix for a copy of the Student Directions). Nevertheless, there is always the chance that some students may have misunderstood the assignment, or may have had difficulty with it for some reason. To monitor the effect of the administration on student performance, teachers giving the assignment were asked to respond to a questionnaire. Of the 120 who responded, 85 percent indicated all students had adequate time for the writing task. A like number felt all students understood the directions. In addition, 92 percent felt the exercise was appropriate for eighth grade students and most students had written on similar assignments.

4. Curriculum and Instruction

We must recognize at the outset that curriculum differs widely district to district, school to school, and even classroom to classroom. An instructor who spends a great deal of instructional time on Organization, for example, may be considerably

less pleased with the statewide results than one who spends relatively little time and has, therefore, very different expectations about student performance. The teacher survey indicated that approximately 60 percent of the teachers were familiar with teaching writing as a process, which is the focus of the curriculum adopted by the State. Consequently, it is possible that a substantial portion of teachers are teaching writing skills in a manner different from the State perspective. In addition, only about 20 percent of the teachers were familiar with the method of assessment used by the State. Some may have viewed the qualities of good writing differently than what has been described in the scoring system used for this assessment.

5. Test Anxiety

For many students, test anxiety is so overwhelming that it may preclude top-level performance. Such intervention is particularly unfortunate in this case since the statewide writing assessment is not really a test in the usual sense at all. It is a diagnosis of performance intended to provide a data base for improving instruction. We have attempted in both introductory and followup materials to make this intent clear—yet we recognize that for some students, writing itself may seem a bit intimidating, and writing for an unknown audience may, for some, heighten that anxiety.

Certainly many other factors can influence performance as well—a student's health on the day of testing, for example, or current frame of mind. We ask you to keep these and other factors in mind as you interpret the results.

To further assist you, the next chapter offers the comments and recommendations of the Oregon Statewide Writing Assessment Interpretive Panel, which convened May 18, 1987, to review the results of the assessment, discuss the implications of those results for instruction in the state, and offer recommendations to the Oregon Department of Education.

Chapter 5:
The Oregon Writing Assessment Interpretive Panel—Comments and Recommendations

The Oregon Writing Assessment Interpretive Panel met at the Oregon Department of Education in Salem on May 18, 1987, to review the results of the 1987 statewide writing assessment. They met for three purposes:

- To help lay and professional audiences understand the results more fully.
- To identify key issues for consideration in the future.
- To offer recommendations concerning actions that writing teachers and that the Oregon Department of Education might take to improve the instruction of writing.

During their meeting, the panel members reviewed the prompt, the methods by which scores were assigned, and the scoring guide itself. In addition, they looked at sample papers representing the range of score levels.

In addition, they reviewed summaries of students' performance relative to all traits. They considered both average performance on all traits, and the percentage of students who had received each possible score (1.0, 1.5, 2.0, etc.) on the five-point scoring scale. (See Appendix for a list of Panel Members.)

Findings

Following are the highlights of the panel's findings.

1. Across all traits, 3s (i.e., scores of 3.0) tend to predominate. In general, we are seeing more students at the 3 level than we would like to see. At the same time, though, educators interpreting scores at local levels are cautioned to look beyond averages. Merely exceeding the state average with respect to performance on a given trait is not a worthy goal. A better question to ask is, Where are our student writers now, and where do we want them to be?
2. Despite the fact that some improvements in performance from 1985 to 1987 are likely attributable to the change in prompt, we are still seeing signs of strength across several traits—notably Voice, Sentence Structure, and Conventions. Averages may not be as high as we'd like to see them, but averages alone do not tell the whole story. It's clear that many writing teachers are using strategies that are working.
3. As in 1985, the pattern of performance for Word Choice differs somewhat from that for other traits. More students cluster at the 3 level; relatively fewer demonstrate either pronounced strengths or weaknesses. This is likely because while students are communicating ideas fairly clearly, they are not stretching. They are choosing "safe" words that communicate at a

rudimentary level, but they are not using language to think, to clarify ideas, to explore new ways of looking at things. Too many language models, including television and films, present language at the "3" level. They communicate in a routine way, and this is what student writers emulate. In order to make a difference, we need to provide students with good models—to surround them with literature, for instance. Vocabulary drills are *not* the answer. They tend to produce the kind of writing in which the student uses words to impress, not because they fit the context—as these examples of students' writing illustrate:

- "It was just a *quintessential* room . . ."
- "I *circumspected* into the school."

4. Results in Conventions should not encourage more direct instruction related to conventions per se. What's really needed is a focus on editing and revising skills. Students need strategies for revising and editing, and teachers need inservice in presenting these skills effectively.

5. The writing assessment is an attempt to quantify a subjective experience. There is a temptation to focus primarily on the numbers—the performance averages for each trait. But in analyzing the value of this process, we must also look behind the numbers. What matters ultimately is building understanding among student writers, teachers and administrators about what good writing is. The analytical assessment approach is bringing us closer to this understanding. Student writers as well as teachers should have the opportunity to receive training in the analytical process. One of the best ways to build writing skill is through analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in writing.

6. In devising strategies to improve students' writing skills, we must be cautious about treating the traits in isolation. Assessing them individually has value because it allows us to see where particular strengths and weaknesses lie. But teaching to one trait—e.g., Organization—to the exclusion of others could ultimately be damaging. The traits are interrelated; each depends to an extent on the others. Individual exercises relating to specific traits may be effective as long as they are presented in the broader context of improving overall writing skills.

7. The analytical scoring guide has potential as a tool for teaching writing across the curriculum. We should consider inservice in scoring for all teachers who might deal primarily with those traits most closely related to thinking skills: i.e., Ideas and Content, Organization, and Voice.

8. One of the primary values in the scoring guide is that it encourages all teachers who use it to look at writing in the same way—to be consistent about what they value. We can build on this strength by encouraging teachers to work together at the building level, scoring papers, forming support groups, and discussing what *they* value in writing.

Recommendations: Teacher Level

1. Ensure that any inservice provided incorporates an understanding of the instructional methods current research says are most productive (e.g., providing instruction in grammar and other conventions only as needed, encouraging teachers to write with students, focusing on positive responses, combining writing and reading).
2. Provide inservice to help teachers create the kind of school and classroom environment that breaks unproductive instructional patterns and fosters good writing.
3. Include parents and student writers in some inservice projects; this will strengthen communications about writing.
4. Provide models that show teachers how to work together at the building level to foster better classroom assessment and instructional methods.
5. Allow students to break away from the safety of writing "formula" papers; encourage them to take more risks in their writing. The highest quality, most heartfelt papers often don't follow a standard pattern. Let students know that alternate approaches are acceptable.
6. Beware of setting expectations too low. Students *can* write. The potential has been demonstrated. We must take care, therefore, to respect this ability, and not to focus so much on ways of dealing with problems that we forget the importance of finding ways to recognize and reward the strengths in student writing.

Recommendations: State Level

1. Provide increased support to such projects as the Oregon Writing Project.
2. Ensure increased focus on the writing process and the analytical assessment model at major conferences.
3. Provide increased support to the State Writing Festival.
4. Expand the assessment in future years to explore writing skills at other grade levels.
5. Conduct a teacher survey to determine current teaching practices across the state: e.g., the extent to which teachers are familiar with or using components of the writing process.
6. Recommend to the State Board of Education that it require greater emphasis on preparation for the teaching of writing skills within college and university teacher training programs.
7. Encourage ESD sponsorship of centers for good writing.
8. In future assessments, incorporate a strong inservice component to allow more teachers to participate in the scoring process.

9. Communicate with State Board of Education members, legislators and budget committees about the importance of the writing assessment, and the potential link with inservice.

10. Explore the need for specific workshops on such topics as the following:

    - Analytical Assessment of Writing Skills
    - The Link Between Analytical Assessment and Writing Instruction
    - Handling the Paper Load Resulting from Frequent Student Writing Assignments
    - Effective Conferencing
    - Managing Peer Review

11. Identify teachers throughout the state who are teaching writing successfully, and provide a network for sharing information on their strategies and skills. Explore the use of videotape or cable TV for sharing such information.

12. Consider establishing a telephone network in which successful teachers would volunteer a small percentage of their time to respond to telephone inquiries from other teachers about specific strategies (e.g., managing peer review groups).

13. Provide more publicity on the writing assessment via newsletters, trade journals, etc.

14. Sponsor a series of regional workshops that would increase awareness of the writing assessment process throughout the state, and perhaps open new doors to linking assessment with instruction.

A Final Note: Followup to the 1987 Statewide Writing Assessment

The Oregon Department of Education held a three-day inservice session as a followup to the 1987 Statewide Writing Assessment. Classroom teachers and other educators from throughout the state attended a workshop in late June 1987 to gain a better understanding of analytical scoring procedures and the link between analytical assessment and instruction. Such persons will then serve as resources to district staff throughout the state who may wish more information on analytical scoring, or who may be interested in pursuing some scoring at the district or building level. If you would like a list of participants (i.e., persons who may serve as resources on writing assessment information for the 1987-88 school year), or would like more information on the 1987 analytical assessment procedures, please contact

Dr. Wayne Neuburger
Director of Assessment and Evaluation
Oregon Department of Education
700 Pringle Parkway S.E.
Salem, Oregon 97310-0290

Readers who are interested in learning more about the Oregon Writing Assessment may also wish to read additional information included in the appendices:

- Student Directions
- Letter to Students Accompanying Results
- List of Interpretive Panel Members for 1987

Appendices

Oregon Statewide Writing Assessment
STUDENT DIRECTIONS

The following directions tell you how to produce your writing sample for the Oregon Statewide Assessment in writing. Read them carefully, and ask your teacher if you have any questions or find any part of them unclear.

DAY 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

Starting tomorrow, you will be participating in an activity called a writing assessment. The word "assessment" means that your writing will be reviewed by specially trained teachers who will *assess* the strengths and weaknesses in each paper. There is no "passing" score, and there are no right or wrong answers. We expect each paper to be a little different from the others even though all the eighth graders who take part in the assessment write on the same topic. The scores you get back will tell you what particular writing strengths *your* paper has, and where there is the most need for improvement.

Today, we will give you a writing topic that you can think about overnight. You will do all your writing here in the classroom, but you are free to talk over the topic with friends or family. Here is the topic you will write on tomorrow:

> *Write about an object that is important to you, something that has become part of your life or reminds you of a person, place or time that you like to remember.*

You may write your response as a letter, story, essay or any other form of PROSE you choose (but NO POEMS, please).

Tomorrow, you will be asked to complete a rough draft. On the following day, you will be asked to revise your rough draft, making any changes you wish. You will also be asked to recopy your sample onto a special form and to proofread what you've written. Only the final draft of your paper will be scored.

You do NOT have to study anything to prepare for the writing assessment. But you should spend some time thinking about the topic, and if you wish to discuss it with someone else, that is fine. Because we will be making judgments based on the results of this assessment about the writing skills of all eighth grade students in Oregon, it is important that you do your best writing.

DAY 2: WRITING THE ROUGH DRAFT

Today you are going to spend 45 minutes writing your rough draft on the topic shown above. You should write in pencil or pen (your choice) on regular notebook paper, on one side of the page only. Please write only on EVERY OTHER LINE of the paper, so that you have room to revise your work later. Put your name in the upper right corner of *each page* of your rough draft.

Keep in mind that one mark of a good writer is the ability to be concise--that is, to express ideas clearly and completely without using unnecessary words. We ask that you do your best to make your FINAL writing sample no longer than two or three pages. Because your rough draft is to be written on every other line, it may be somewhat longer than this. But when you write your final version in the Student Writing Sample Booklet, you'll write on every line and you'll need to make certain the sample will fit in the writing booklet.

Your teacher will show you a copy of the writing booklet so you can see how much space you have to write your final copy.

At the end of the period, your teacher will collect your rough draft. Tomorrow, you will get this draft back, and you will have about sixty minutes to revise, edit and recopy what you have written. For the students in some Oregon schools, this will mean one class period. For others, it may mean one whole class period plus part of another.

DAY 3: REVISING AND EDITING THE ROUGH DRAFT, AND RECOPYING AND PROOFREADING THE FINAL DRAFT

Today you should revise and edit the rough draft that you wrote yesterday. You may use a dictionary or thesaurus whenever you wish. Feel free to use a pen or pencil for revising and editing, and to make as many changes or corrections on your rough copy as you wish. As you revise and edit, be sure that you have

1. Stated your ideas clearly.
2. Stayed on the topic.
3. Chosen the best words and phrases to get your ideas across.
4. Organized your ideas so that they are clear and easy to follow.
5. Developed a good beginning and ending for your paper.
6. Used correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization.
7. Written something that really shows *how you think and feel about the topic.*

These seven points will all be looked at in scoring your writing.

Your teacher will give you a Student Writing Sample form at the beginning of the period. You will write your final copy in this booklet. Take time right now to print your name and your teacher's name, check "M" or "F" to show whether you are male or female, and write your grade level (probably 8) in the spaces provided at the top of the test booklet. Your teacher will tell you a "school code" and a "class code"; you should write those in the appropriate boxes as well. Once you've completed the information at the top of the form, you can begin to revise, edit and recopy your sample.

You know how fast you write, so you'll be the one to decide how much time to leave before the period ends to recopy and proofread the revised rough draft. TRY TO LEAVE TIME TO READ OVER YOUR FINAL COPY AT LEAST ONCE BEFORE YOU HAND IT IN.

Please use a PEN, not a pencil, to copy your final draft into the writing sample booklet. Remember, unlike when you wrote on every other line for your rough draft, you should write on <u>every line</u> for this final copy.

As you are recopying, make any last-minute changes that you wish. Refer to a dictionary or thesaurus as many times as you need to. If necessary, you may cross out or add words on the final copy. But you should <u>NOT</u> be adding much new writing to your draft at this time--just copying what you've already written. After you have finished recopying your work, proofread it one last time. Remember, if your class period is less than 60 minutes long, your teacher will give you a little extra time tomorrow (if anyone needs it) to finish recopying.

Your scores on this writing sample will be returned to you before the end of the school year. Thank you for sharing a sample of your writing with us.

VERNE A. DUNCAN
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
700 PRINGLE PARKWAY SE, SALEM, OREGON 97310-0290 PHONE (503) 378-3569

April 1987

TO: Selected Oregon Eighth Graders

Last February you and several thousand other students throughout Oregon were asked to write about "an important object." We are returning your scored paper. The purpose of this letter is to explain what the scores mean.

The papers were read by a specially trained team of readers. They included language arts teachers and professional writers and editors--people who can recognize the strengths and weaknesses within a piece of writing. Two readers, working separately, judged six different aspects of your writing. A description of what they looked at will be provided by your teacher.

The shaded box on the first page of your paper shows the scores given by both readers. Scores range from a low of 1 to a high of 5. When the two scores differ, it doesn't mean that one score is "right" and the other is "wrong"; even trained, experienced readers sometimes have different reactions to the same piece of writing.

The scores do not relate to letter grades. In other words, a 5 is not an A, a 3 is not a C, and a 1 is not an F. Think of the scores in terms of strengths and weaknesses. A score of 3 means your paper has about equal numbers of strengths and weaknesses. As you go up the scoring scale from 3 towards 5, strengths begin to outweigh weaknesses. As you go down the scoring scale from 3 towards 1, weaknesses begin to outweigh strengths.

As you re-read your paper, ask yourself how <u>you</u> would score the paper. What do you think are its strengths? Its weaknesses?

Thank you for taking part in this statewide writing assessment. We hope you'll keep writing and that you agree that writing is a valuable skill. The information we've gathered through the statewide assessment will guide our efforts to make writing instruction as effective as possible for you and other Oregon students. We appreciate your help.

Cordially,

Verne A. Duncan
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

VAD:sa

WRITING
1987 Statewide Assessment of Eighth Graders

Content Panel

Don Blanchard, Beaverton School District

Darlene Clarridge, Multnomah County Education Service District

Irene Golden, Lincoln County School District

Kathleen Kollasch, Lincoln County School District

Sheila Peabody, Bend-LaPine School District

Linda Peters, Portland School District

Lana Stanley, Pendleton School District

Jack Stoops, Springfield School District

Patty Wixon, Ashland School District